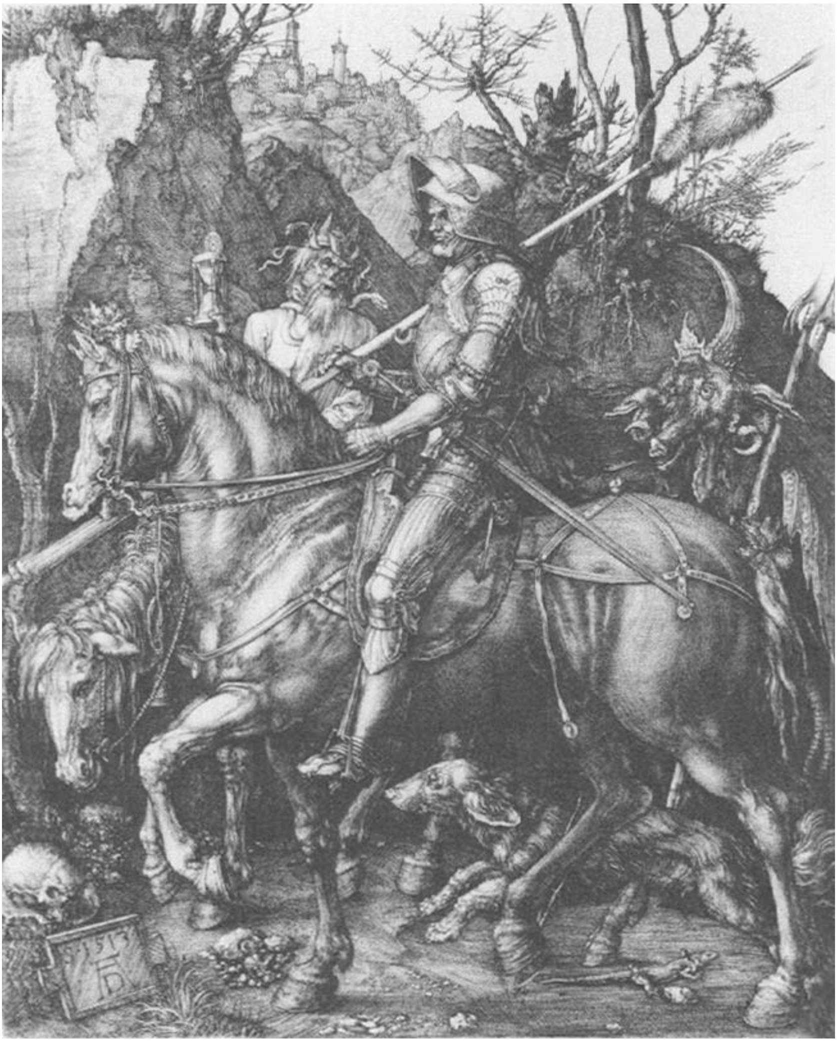
COLLECTED WORKS OF ERASMUS

VOLUME 66



Knight, Death, and the Devil
Albrecht Dürer
The central figure in this copper engraving is probably
the Christian soldier of Ephesians 6:10–18. His magnificent
horse and vigilant hound are in strong contrast with
the devil's drooping mount and the lifeless landscape.
Kupferstichkabinett
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (West)
Photo: Jörg P. Anders

COLLECTED WORKS OF ERASMUS

SPIRITUALIA

ENCHIRIDION
DE CONTEMPTU MUNDI
DE VIDUA CHRISTIANA

edited by John W. O'Malley

University of Toronto Press

Toronto / Buffalo / London

The research and publication costs of the
Collected Works of Erasmus are supported by the
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
The publication costs are also assisted by
University of Toronto Press.
www.utppublishing.com
©University of Toronto Press 1988
Toronto / Buffalo / London
Printed in Canada
ISBN 0-8020-2656-7

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data
Erasmus, Desiderius, d. 1536
[Works]
Collected Works of Erasmus
Partial contents: v. 66

Collected Works of Erasmus

The aim of the Collected Works of Erasmus
is to make available an accurate, readable English text
of Erasmus' correspondence and his
other principal writings. The edition is planned
and directed by an Editorial Board, an Executive Committee,
and an Advisory Committee.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Alexander Dalzell, University of Toronto
James M. Estes, University of Toronto
Charles Fantazzi, University of Windsor
Anthony T. Grafton, Princeton University
Paul F. Grendler, University of Toronto
James K. McConica, University of Toronto, *Chairman*
Erika Rummel, *Executive Assistant*
Robert D. Sider, Dickinson College
J.K. Sowards, Wichita State University
G.M. Story, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Craig R. Thompson, University of Pennsylvania

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Harald Bohne, University of Toronto Press
Alexander Dalzell, University of Toronto
James M. Estes, University of Toronto
Charles Fantazzi, University of Windsor
Anthony T. Grafton, Princeton University
Paul F. Grendler, University of Toronto
James K. McConica, University of Toronto
Ian Montagnes, University of Toronto Press
R.J. Schoeck, University of Colorado
R.M. Schoeffel, University of Toronto Press, *Chairman*
Robert D. Sider, Dickinson College
J.K. Sowards, Wichita State University
G.M. Story, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Craig R. Thompson, University of Pennsylvania
Prudence Tracy, University of Toronto Press

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, University of British Columbia
Maria Cytowska, University of Warsaw
O.B. Hardison jr, Georgetown University
Otto Herding, Universität Freiburg
Jozef IJsewijn, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Robert M. Kingdon, University of Wisconsin
Paul Oskar Kristeller, Columbia University
Maurice Lebel, Université Laval
Jean-Claude Margolin, Centre d'études supérieures de la Renaissance de Tours
Bruce M. Metzger, Princeton Theological Seminary
Clarence H. Miller, St Louis University
Heiko A. Oberman, University of Arizona
John Rowlands, British Museum
J.S.G. Simmons, Oxford University
John Tedeschi, University of Wisconsin
J. Trapman, Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen
J.B. Trapp, Warburg Institute

Contents

Introduction
by John W. O'Malley
ix

The Handbook of the Christian Soldier
Enchiridion militis christiani
translated and annotated by Charles Fantazzi
1

On Disdaining the World / *De contemptu mundi*
translated and annotated by Erika Rummel
129

On the Christian Widow / *De vidua christiana*
translated by Jennifer Tolbert Roberts
annotated by John W. O'Malley and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts
177

Notes
259

Works Frequently Cited
335

Short-Title Forms for Erasmus' Works
339

Index
343

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

I

The editors of CWE have selected twenty of Erasmus' works for inclusion in the collection of *spiritualia*. As an enclosure with his well-known letter to Hector Boece of 15 March 1530, Erasmus divided his writings up to that time into nine *ordines*, the fifth of which contained those pertaining to *pietas*.[1] All of those, as well as some others, were included in the fifth volume of the Leiden edition of the *Opera*. Erasmus' list has served as the starting point for the present designation of *spiritualia* as well, although some works Erasmus placed in this category have for good reason been relegated to other volumes,[2] and five written after 1530 have been added. In neither the catalogue of 1530 nor in the earlier one composed for Johann von Botzheim in 1523 did Erasmus explicitly mention the *De tedio Iesu*, possibly because of its epistolary form, but CWE includes it, as does the fifth volume of the Leiden edition. Thus we have fourteen works from Erasmus' original list of twenty-six, five written after 1530, and one absent from the catalogues. The three works contained in the present volume have been published first simply because they were the first to be prepared.

By editorial decision this introduction is meant to serve for all the volumes in the series and to deal in a general way with the wide variety of issues that pertain to Erasmian *pietas*, even those that arise in works not included among the *spiritualia*. The last section, however, concentrates on the *Enchiridion*, *De contemptu mundi*, and *De vidua christiana*. Subsequent volumes will contain similarly brief treatments of the specific works they contain.

Generally speaking, the publication date for the *editio princeps* of the twenty *spiritualia* corresponds to the year in which Erasmus completed writing them. The major exception is *De contemptu mundi*, most of which was composed in the monastery of Steyn about 1488/9 but not published until 1521. The various pieces first published as a collection in 1503 under the title

Lucubrationes were written sometime between 1499 and the date of publication, but that fact does not change their location in the chronology of works included in these volumes. Listed in order of composition, along with the date of first publication, the *spiritualia* include:

De contemptu mundi (1521)
Virginis Matris paean (1503)
Obsecratio ad Virginem Matrem (1503)
Precatio ad Virginis filium Iesum (1503)
Disputatiuncula de tedio ... Iesu (1503)
Enchiridion militis christiani (1503; rev ed 1518)
Liturgia Virginis Lauretanae (1523; rev ed 1525)
Precatio dominica (1523)
Virginis et martyris comparatio (1524)
Modus orandi Deum (1524)
Exomologesis sive modus confitendi (1524)
Christiani matrimonii institutio (1526)
Epistola consolatoria sacris virginibus (1528)
De vidua christiana (1529)
De magnitudine misericordiarum Domini concio (1529)
Precatio ad Dominum Iesum pro pace ecclesiae (1532)
Explanatio symboli, sive Catechismus (1533)
De praeparatione ad mortem (1534)
Precationes aliquot novae (1535)
Ecclesiastes sive de ratione concionandi (1535)

Simply listing these works reveals problems with the designation *spiritualia*, perhaps the least specific of all the categories used to organize Erasmus' immense corpus. The number of these works is large. They range chronologically from his earliest composition of substance, *De contemptu mundi*, to the *Precationes* and *Ecclesiastes*, written the year before he died. They include treatises, prayers, letters, a liturgy with sermon, a *concio*, and a catechism. Some are more theoretical, like *De vidua christiana*, whereas others have more practical aims, like *De praeparatione ad mortem*. These works vary considerably in length, from the *Ecclesiastes*, which is 331 folio columns in the Leiden edition, to the *Precationes*, some of which come to hardly a paragraph. The designation *spiritualia* does not in practice imply, moreover, that all works dealing with a specific topic will be gathered under it. Erasmus' treatise on marriage, for example, appears here, while his *Encomium matrimonii* and colloquies on the same subject do not.

In short, other ways of grouping these works might be more appropriate, depending on the viewpoint from which one desired to approach them. On the other hand, much can be said for the attempt to respect in principle

Erasmus' own category, and one would be hard pressed in many instances to find a better designation than the one he himself devised. Moreover, the variety and chronological span of these twenty pieces provide an opportunity to examine a central Erasmian term, *pietas*, against the evidence both of some of his best-known and most thoroughly studied works, like the *Enchiridion*, and of some of those that are scarcely known even to specialists.

None the less, the fact that we have to some extent diverged from Erasmus' catalogue points to a fundamental problem in this area of scholarship. *Pace* Erasmus himself, it could be argued that everything he wrote pertained immediately or remotely to the promotion of *pietas*. If we are to study that *pietas*, how can we possibly exclude from consideration works like the *Paraclesis*, the *Convivium religiosum* or the famous letter to Justus Jonas concerning John Colet and Jean Vitrier?[3] Even his program for the reform of education had a religious component, and the pagan classics themselves were not, in his view, devoid of religious inspiration. The reform of theology that he sought required that theology lead to a 'life that befits a theologian,' that is, to personal piety, as his prefatory letter to Volz concerning the *Enchiridion* so clearly pointed out.[4] True theology was for him, at least under certain aspects, indistinguishable from piety: 'Theology is piety, joined with skill in speaking on sacred subjects.'[5] Thus he quite consistently included the *Methodus verae theologiae* in his fifth *ordo*, although it is omitted here.

When we deal with Erasmian *pietas*, in other words, we must deal with it as a seamless robe that envelops all he wrote. The works published in these volumes of *spiritualia* must be considered, therefore, as a broad but not fully representative sample, which can never be treated in isolation from the rest of Erasmus' writings if we wish to have the full and true picture of what he meant by *pietas* and all that it implied for him.

This brings us to the term itself. In his *Enchiridion* Erasmus used the words *pius* or *pietas* over a hundred times, a good indication of the centrality of the idea in his thinking. In one of the first English translations of that work (1534), the words were rendered in some fifty different ways, as Sister Anne O'Donnell pointed out in her able edition.[6] The terms had classical resonances, of course, but godliness, holiness, charitable living, virtuous or devout life, and genuine piety are English equivalents that spring to mind. These equivalents must be given content, however, and then shaped according to the context, often polemical, in which Erasmus invested them with meaning. Even if we say that when Erasmus dealt with *pietas* he was dealing with what today is known as 'spirituality,' we must exercise considerable caution. 'Spirituality' has all too often designated almost exclusively systems of prayer, asceticism, and steps to mystical union with

God. Understood in that way, it is too narrow – and possibly at the same time too broad – to encapsulate Erasmus' meaning.

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of Erasmian *pietas* that distinguishes it from what is conventionally conceived as spirituality is its relationship to theology and ministry. Histories of spirituality are often written with little regard for theological systems and almost as alternatives to them. Attempts to construct out of such spirituality a 'spiritual theology' juxtaposed to doctrinal, dogmatic, or systematic theology only highlight the constrast with Erasmus' position.[7] It is significant, moreover, that in most histories of Christian spirituality Erasmus receives little more than perfunctory notice.

In Erasmus' view, the scholastics created a dichotomy between spirituality and theology, and that fact is fundamental in explaining his consistent and sometimes fierce antagonism to the 'recent theologians.' His opposition did not spring from disagreement over one or another theological conclusion, for he was sometimes in agreement with them, but from dissatisfaction with the scholastic enterprise as such. When Aquinas in the very first question of his *Summa theologiae* defined theology as primarily a 'contemplative' discipline that takes as its object God as he is in himself, he in effect divorced it from both piety and ministry and created a rupture in the 'true and more ancient' theological tradition of the church.[8] In his succinct and precise way, Aquinas hit on a key assumption of the scholastic system, even though the divorce from piety and ministry was unwitting, always unintended, and often compensated in other ways, as we see in the feverish production by the scholastics of their *artes praedicandi.*

Nothing is perhaps more characteristic of Erasmus in this regard than his striving to integrate *pietas*, theology, and the practice of ministry. This is where we discover in profound fashion the seamless robe of his *pietas*, and this is why in his catalogue for Boece he could group together under that heading his *Enchiridion*, his work on the sacrament of confession, and his *Ratio verae theologiae*. Piety, theology, and ministry were for him but different aspects of one reality. He would have subscribed to the traditional Anselmian definition of the task of theology, 'fides quaerens intellectum,' but with qualifications that would reorient it. We can paraphrase him by saying that for him theology was 'fides quaerens intellectum, *ut amet*.'[9] Love would, moreover, animate effective ministry.

Was Erasmus, then, 'primarily or essentially' a theologian? Was he a theologian at all? These questions are too intimately related to an understanding of his *pietas* to be bypassed. The answers will perforce depend upon one's presuppositions about the nature of theology, which in turn determine the method one adopts to approach the issue and the works one chooses to study. For a long time Erasmus was judged almost exclusively on a few works like the *Enchiridion, De libero arbitrio,* and the *Colloquies* rather than other writings, to say nothing of his full corpus. A great advantage of the present collection of *spiritualia* is that it forces us to consider works that Erasmus himself considered pertinent to *pietas.*

The long history of the interpretation of Erasmus shows conclusively how reluctant critics have been to view him as a theologian, or at least a 'good' theologian. This is not the place to rehash that long and complicated story, for which Bruce Mansfield has provided us an excellent history up to 1750.[10] We might say in general, however, that Erasmus' altercation with Luther in 1524–5 and the placing of his *Opera* on the Roman *Index librorum prohibitorum* of 1559 set a tradition for both Protestants and Catholics for centuries to come. Moreover, the peculiar turns both Protestant and Catholic theology took from the middle of the sixteenth century deprived theologians of the perspectives they needed to approach judiciously and fairly Erasmus' writings on piety, theology, and ministry. Some of them, especially those like the *Ecclesiastes* and the *Explanatio symboli* that dealt with both ministry and doctrine, were almost lost from memory. A study published as late as 1967 on the sixteenth-century origins of modern catechisms, for instance, failed even to mention Erasmus' *Explanatio.*[11] This situation helped deliver Erasmus into the hands of the Enlightenment as its darling, so that from no quarter could emerge an examination of this central aspect of his life's work. He was at best a 'moralist,' at worst a 'sceptic' – or vice versa, depending on one's point of view.

The situation has changed dramatically, especially in the past twenty years. A number of distinguished scholars have tried to vindicate the theological seriousness of Erasmus' enterprise and have found that his theological concerns permeate all his writings, but especially those professedly dealing with *pietas.* The reasons for this shift are complex and perhaps impervious to full recovery. Among them, however, must be mentioned the revival of biblical and patristic studies, the emergence of the so-called 'critical-historical' method in theology with its decided affinities with Erasmus' own methods, the more serene atmosphere generated by the ecumenical movement, the recognition, especially among Catholics, of certain inadequacies in scholastic and neo-scholastic presuppositions about theology, and finally the Second Vatican Council. Several historians have in fact perceived Erasmian resonances in that event and have even referred to it as an 'Erasmian council.'[12] Perhaps most important of all, in our so-called 'post-Christian' age we have at last been enabled by the sheer force of contrast to see how profoundly Christian Erasmus' enterprise was, at least in intent.

Today most scholars who address the issue, therefore, concede or try to vindicate Erasmus' right to be considered a theologian.[13] Others, while not denying the important place of theology in his work, prefer to consider him 'an unclassifiable humanist'[14] or judge that to designate him 'primarily' a theologian is to overstate the case.[15] No matter how one chooses to label Erasmus, however, one can no longer deny that he was deeply concerned about ministry, doctrine, theology, and theological method and that he saw all these as closely related to *pietas*, to *pie beateque vivendi ars*. That fact, at least, seems established beyond question. The task, then, is to try to understand the relationship, not to question its existence.

The advances in this regard in the past twenty years have been considerable. In the first place, we have a much better understanding of the Christian sources that influenced Erasmus and from which he drew inspiration, especially the Fathers of the church. Charles Béné's *Erasme et saint Augustin* of 1969 was the first major study of this phenomenon and, though critics have pointed out its limitations, was a kind of landmark.[16] André Godin's massive *Erasme: Lecteur d'Origène*, which summarizes his findings presented piecemeal in a number of studies, is the culmination of decades of research.[17] Eugene Rice, John Olin, and others have studied Erasmus' relationship to St Jerome.[18] Georges Chantraine has written about his relationship to St Basil.[19] In the present volume Erika Rummel's *testimonia* show conclusively and for the first time the influence of Eucherius on *De contemptu mundi*, and Charles Fantazzi's give substance to the suggestion often made that the 'rules' in the *Enchiridion* show some dependence on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's similar document. Recent studies of Erasmus as exegete and editor of the New Testament have been important as well.[20]

Especially significant, however, have been the studies that have concentrated on the doctrinal dimension in Erasmus' writings. The earlier assessment of him as a moralist unconcerned with doctrine and traditional institutions cannot be sustained.[21] Some years ago John Payne studied in a comprehensive way his sacramental theology,[22] and Payne was followed by others who showed the seriousness, but balance, with which Erasmus viewed those institutions and the part they played in his *pietas*.[23] There are no similar studies about Erasmus' stance regarding liturgy, but, as will be clear below, his attitude was much more positive than his often bitter words about 'Judaizing ceremonies' would suggest. He has more to say about the role of liturgy in Christian life than does, for instance, his younger contemporary Ignatius Loyola. Recent scholars have commended Erasmus' christology and, indeed, his mariology for their balance and orthodoxy.[24]

Although we need further studies of Erasmus' ecclesiology, perhaps in no other area of doctrine has he been more fully vindicated.[25] He has been shown to be more orthodox on some ecclesiological issues, for instance, than were his critics from the faculty of theology at the University of Paris.[26] The dogmatic constitution on the church of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium,* reads at times like Erasmus himself. This aspect of Christian teaching had been since the Gregorian reform of the eleventh century closely related to the development of canon law and in Erasmus' day was dominated by juridical categories and questions of order and authority. Erasmus' recovery of patristic teaching on the church and his concern for the more doctrinal and even mystical aspects of it was a brief moment of enlightenment. In the heat of controversy over the nature of 'the true church,' Cardinal Bellarmine and other Catholic apologists of the Counter-Reformation imposed an even more thoroughly juridical and political model on ecclesiological thinking until the advent of Johann Adam Moeller and others in the nineteenth century. These latter writers revived an appreciation for the patristic vision of the church not dissimilar to Erasmus'.[27]

In all these areas more research needs to be done. The imbalance in scholarship to which I alluded earlier has yet to be overcome. Some few of Erasmus' works receive an overwhelming amount of attention, whereas others are neglected. One searches almost in vain for studies of *De vidua christiana* and Erasmus' many prayers.[28] The *Institutio christiani matrimonii,* one of the longest works included among the *spiritualia,* has received only one major study, which examined only certain aspects of it and interpreted the work with highly questionable presuppositions about the author's sincerity.[29] Further research on it will surely reveal interesting information about Erasmus' grasp of canon law as it related to marriage. Particularly neglected have been the works like the *Exomologesis* and the *Ecclesiastes* that looked directly to a reform of ministry, with the result that we have failed to recognize ministry as an absolutely central concern of Erasmus and that we are only beginning to grasp its profound implications for understanding him.

II

Any attempt to discuss the meaning and character of Erasmian *pietas* must deal with the complexities that recent scholarship has brought to light. It would be foolhardy to try to summarize and synthesize that scholarship on this theme, for it would be almost tantamount to summarizing and synthesizing everything that has been written on Erasmus. Some orientation is needed, however.[30] We can get our bearings within Erasmian *pietas* if we approach it under four headings: its general qualities or modes, its content, its sources, and its literary forms.

MODES

Several overarching characteristics of Erasmian *pietas* constitute the most general framework for interpretation of it and help distinguish it from other articulations of Christian 'spirituality,' if we may now safely use that term. As 'modes' of Erasmian *pietas*, these characteristics extend well beyond that *pietas* itself and suggest the personality that stands behind it.

One such quality or mode is catholicity or cultural comprehensiveness. Erasmian *pietas* is conditioned by the author's wide grasp of the central intellectual and religious traditions of his culture, which he possessed in an extraordinarily eminent degree. In that sense his *pietas* was radically traditional. The more Erasmus is studied, the more apparent becomes the breadth of his vision and the firmness of his understanding of the culture whose heir he viewed himself to be. No serious scholar questions his knowledge of the classics, the Bible, and the Fathers, although studies continue to expose the profundity of it. We now see more clearly, moreover, that, while he disdained *esoterica* like the cabbala,[31] he had a decent, if generally antipathetic, knowledge of the scholastics, knew something about canon law, was not insensitive to sacramental and liturgical questions, and had thought deeply and well about church dogma. He also reflected upon his own experience and was sensitive to that of his contemporaries, with the elite of whom he probably had more communication than any of his peers. He traveled widely. As was said later and probably with less reason of Lord Acton, he 'knew everyone worth knowing, read everything worth reading.'[32] His *pietas* was not culturally isolated or parochial. It was related to culture in a way and to a degree that the writings of Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa, Luís de León, and even Ignatius Loyola are not.

All this allowed Erasmus to shape his *pietas* within the broadest historical context. His erudition was not a confused mass of information but was organized by him into interpretive schemes that allowed him to perceive what he believed were the deeper and more perennial elements of the Christian tradition and to distinguish them from more ephemeral, less authentic elements. Like many of his humanist peers but seemingly unlike many of his other contemporaries, he therefore was keenly aware of the difference between 'ancient' and 'recent,' and this awareness helped effect in him a critical sense based on sure information. He warned Maarten van Dorp in 1515 against acting 'like one of our ordinary divines, who habitually attribute anything that has somehow slipped into current usage to the authority of the church.'[33] He came to see that the present was not the standard against which to measure the past, but the past, rather, provided norms by which to judge the present.

Erasmus' *pietas* is imbued, therefore, with a second quality, almost a dialectical opposite to its traditionalism. It is corrective. Erasmus was a reformer. In other words, he defined his *pietas* in large part as an alternative to much of what he saw around him. His enterprise, like that of so many reformers, was not simply to understand the past but to use it as an instrument to correct, not confirm, the present.[34] That statement needs a thousand qualifications, of course, for Erasmus' enterprise was sturdily confirmatory of what he believed were the deepest impulses and the most genuine institutions of his tradition. But, as anyone knows who has read even a few of his works, there is a sharply corrective edge to his writings, even those that are not generally considered polemical. This is true also of his *pietas* and explains much of the controversy that that ideal aroused, for in itself it was not nearly so novel in some of its aspects as his critics, or even Erasmus himself, would sometimes lead us to believe. Many of the ideals he proposed, for instance, can be found in Italian humanists of the preceding century.[35]

Erasmus set out early to correct the practice of theology, divorced as it had become, in his view, from *pietas*. He believed that practice was indeed inimical to *pietas*, for the 'recent theologians' by their incessant disputes, arid style, and attention to irrelevant and even irreverent questions snuffed out the life of the Spirit. He believed as well that this led to pastoral malpractice, as it had in preaching and in ministry to the dying.

Erasmus sometimes expressed or feigned surprise at the vehemence with which the scholastics responded to his criticism. Why did the 'theologians' respond so negatively? Did he not criticize all walks of life?[36] Their response was, of course, quite justified. When Erasmus criticized others, the ground of his complaint was that they did a good thing poorly. When he criticized the scholastics, he was saying, despite his disclaimers, that they were doing a bad thing all too well. Their very enterprise was wrong-headed. Many scholastics rejoiced, in turn, at finding fault with his theology and with the *pietas* to which it was so intimately joined. In the Italian humanists, by and large and for a number of different reasons, less antagonism between the two schools emerged.[37] Erasmus' merit, and burden, was to have perceived some fundamental differences in dynamics in scholastic and humanistic cultures and in their import for piety. This perception, often polemically presented, provoked reaction.

Erasmus also saw his *pietas* as a corrective to contemporary popular piety. His sarcastic and sardonic descriptions of pilgrimages, 'rash' vows, superstitious invocation of the saints, and the veneration of relics are too well known to need elaboration. Erasmus did not propose a 'disembodied' or an entirely 'spiritualized' religion, as sometimes used to be said, but he surely waged war on an attitude and a ministry that put undue trust in external forms to the detriment of inward sentiment. His positive ideal cannot be understood outside this context, as his portrayal of that ideal and its opposite in works like his colloquy *Funus* illustrates so effectively.

Erasmus' *pietas* was meant as well as a corrective for formalities operative at a higher level in society, in religious orders. Of all the lines in his *spiritualia,* none is more famous or aroused more controversy than his affirmation in the *Enchiridion* that the monastic life is not piety – 'Monachatus non est pietas.'[38] More will be said later about how to interpret that statement, but here it can stand as his manifesto that 'monastic observances' are not to be equated with *pietas.* On the contrary, they often militate against it, and in his own day religious orders had substituted talismans, regulations, elaborate liturgies, and other formalities for their original inspiration. In none of these formalities does genuine *pietas* reside. Moreover, true holiness can be pursued and attained outside the cloister and by men and women in every state and condition in life. This last principle was, of course, hardly contrary to the official teaching and practice of the church. Yet the corrective mode of Erasmus' articulation made it seem a challenge and was interpreted as if Erasmus denied 'in principle' the superiority of virginity or celibate chastity to marriage –which, for whatever reason, he did not do.[39]

Erasmus was in general, however, a tireless corrector of morals, and he did not reserve his strictures to members of religious orders or to religious practice. He was disgusted by gluttony and drunkenness, by waste of time and frivolous conversation, by the use of cosmetics and perfumes, and by self-indulgence in dress.[40] His criticism of nudity and what he regarded as lasciviousness in painting and sculpture in his day seems both echoed and, in comparison with Erasmus himself, understated in the few but famous words of the Council of Trent about sacred art.[41]

On the other hand, Erasmian *pietas* has an accommodating quality to it. It was not accomodating, true, to what Erasmus saw as institutional aberrations and moral defects, but it was accommodating to the status, conditions, and personality of the individual. In this it reflected the basic rhetorical principle of the congruence of the speech with the audience.[42]

Varietas fascinated Erasmus, whether it occurred in nature, as he described it in the *Convivium religiosum,*[43] or whether in 'men's natures and circumstances,' as he stated in the famous letter to Volz prefatory to the revised edition of the *Enchiridion.*[44] Since *pietas* was meant for all human beings, it must be malleable enough to find expression in all human conditions. 'Monachatus non est pietas.' The second part of that sentence is less frequently quoted, but is equally important for understanding Erasmus' position: 'sed vitae genus pro suo cuique corporis ingeniique habitu, vel utile, vel inutile'; monasticism is 'a way of life that may be useful or not useful according to each man's physical make-up and disposition.'[45] Monastic life was one style of life among many, and Erasmus was keenly aware that while *pietas* might include it, it could not be defined exclusively in terms of it.

Erasmus often discusses the merits and demerits of different states of life – marriage, widowhood, vowed celibacy, or virginity. The combined impact of the writings of both Erasmus and Luther on these matters made contemporaries extremely apprehensive about them, and Erasmus' own defection from the monastery of Steyn added complexity to the situation. He was a failed monk. Despite all this, no reason exists to doubt Erasmus' repeated affirmations of the validity and even, under the right circumstances, the superiority of virginity over marriage, though he assumed this to be a genuine call for only very few. His statements need to be taken at their face value, not regarded as reluctant or insincere concessions wrung from him by his critics.

None the less, Erasmus prefers to see all states as complementary rather than competing, to see them as expressions of the wonderful *varietas* of temperament and vocation in the church.[46] Instead of dwelling on the abstract issue, however, he would concern himself with help for people in the states in which they find themselves. Although marriage seems to be the state for which most people are suited, no state can be apodictically prescribed as the best in all circumstances. *Pietas* is thus 'gentle and courteous.' Just as God accommodates himself to us in his Word, so does he accommodate himself to us in his call.[47]

This accommodation to the widest possible variety of circumstances does not result in a jumble of particulars, for it is governed by a few generally applicable truths. Another quality of Erasmus' piety, therefore, is its penchant for simplicity. The humanistic tradition in general has been characterized by its weakness for general ideas. If this is sometimes a weakness, it is also a strength, for it indicates the clear lines, the elimination of distracting details, and the serene and evident co-ordination of all parts that we find in classical art and architecture – in contrast with the clutter of details often present in their Gothic counterparts. Erasmian *pietas* would eliminate distracting particulars, and his theology would avoid 'thorny and impenetrable thickets of argument.'[48] He would view everything with 'the single eye filled with light of which the gospel speaks.'[49]

Erasmian *pietas* might, then, also be described as 'principled' rather than 'prescriptive,' to use an old distinction. Part of Erasmus' quarrel with the scholastics was that they wished 'to pronounce on everything.'[50] He found this mentality as inappropriate when applied to *pietas* as when applied to doctrine. The same 'human regulations' cannot be laid down for all, most certainly not for those whose 'lives are governed by the inspiration of the

Holy Spirit,' as Timothy says in the *Convivium religiosum*.[51] This is that 'liberty of spirit' of which he speaks in the letter to Volz.[52] That letter also contains some of his most explicit statements against the abuses of casuistry and a defence of his own more 'principled' position.[53] Erasmus was not trying to reduce affairs to lowest common denominators, but rather to moderate prescriptions that inhibited the full flowering of *varietas* and the manifold expressions of the Spirit in the life of Christians of all states and conditions.

There is, then, a reconciliatory or moderating quality to his *pietas*. The *varietas* of gifts, calls, and circumstances should not be cause for dispute over 'which is greater.' Erasmus would find the middle way between extremes.[54] 'Pax et concordia' or 'pax et unanimitas' is not merely an important doctrine of his *pietas* but a quality that pervades it.[55] The reconciliation of husband and wife, the reconciliation of warring countries, the reconciliation of the classics and the Bible, and, as with many of the scholastics as well, the reconciliation of nature and grace were all parts of the pattern.[56]

Part of Erasmus' distaste for the scholastics stemmed from his belief that, no matter what they held about the relationship between nature and grace as an abstract teaching, the dynamics of their enterprise was polemical and disputatious. It modelled in miniature a pattern of alienation caused by the bitter irreconcilability with each other that resulted from a multitude of conflicting and adamantly held prescriptions or conclusions. He consistently criticized Luther for the tumult that his assertions had aroused, and he found in this fact one of his most conclusive proofs that Luther's position was not divinely inspired.[57]

Thus we come to what might be called the societal or communitarian quality of Erasmus' *pietas*. Respectful though he may have been in principle for the solitude of the monastic cell, he located his ideal elsewhere – in the company of other human beings and especially in the community of the church. In the *Enchiridion* he paraphrased a line from Cicero's *De officiis* that was quoted again and again with the same intent by contemporary humanists: 'non nobis solum nati sumus.' We are not born for ourselves alone.[58]

His *pietas* does not extol silence and seclusion, but is thoroughly Renaissance in its esteem for good company and good conversation as aids to genuine piety, an esteem beautifully dramatized in the *Convivium religiosum*. Moreover, giving succour to the poor, working to promote peace and reduce the evils of war, and, at least to some extent, even bearing the burdens of public office are all integral parts of what his *pietas* generally assumed. His was a spirituality with social concerns, especially in his mature years.[59] The rhetorical tradition of education that took for its aim the training of persons for a life of service in the *polis* surely influenced Erasmus in this regard.

It is appropriate, therefore, to include pastoral works like the *Exomologesis*, the *Explanatio symboli* and the *Ecclesiastes* among the *spiritualia*. The fact that Erasmus placed the *Exomologesis* among his works pertaining to *pietas* argues that he would have placed both the catechism and the *Ecclesiastes* there had they been completed when he composed the catalogue of his writings in 1530. Such a location indicates the public, pastoral, and ecclesial aspect of his *pietas*. His criteria for determining the dogma of the church conceded a large role to the consensus of the Christian community through the ages as manifested in the preaching and practice of the church.[60] That is to say, *pietas* was exercised and promoted by the interaction of human beings ministering to each other, formally or informally, within the community of the church. All authority – even political authority, which he compares in the *Enchiridion* to the care bishops must have of their flocks[61] – was 'service.'

Erasmus' *pietas* was pastoral, and even many of his so-called 'devotional' writings look silently but reproachfully to a reform of the pastoral practice of the church. Once again, histories of spirituality reflect the prejudices of that discipline when they conventionally do not include care of souls and writings concerned with it in their consideration, and they thereby in many instances give a quite truncated view of their subject. Such an exclusion would surely do violence to Erasmus' vision, as it has frequently done for Jesuits and others.[62] The pastoral works of Erasmus are pre-eminently instruments of piety and represent in their very being an important quality or mode of that *pietas*.

A final quality that characterized the *pietas* that Erasmus proposed, for it was embodied in his own person, is that it was learned. Certain reservations are needed here, for in principle the ideal was to be available to all, even to those without formal schooling, even to the 'farmer' and the 'weaver,' as the *Paraclesis* rather idealistically informs us.[63] None the less, Erasmus was far removed from any school of spirituality that would deem learning without import for piety or that would discourage it in its adherents. His was a 'learned piety' – *docta pietas*.[64] In this he was in perfect concert with the reformers of his age, from Luther to Loyola. That learning was not, of course, the type represented by the scholastics, but the combination of classical, biblical, and patristic learning that he himself cherished and so insistently promoted.

CONTENT

Discussion of the modes of Erasmian *pietas* has already suggested something of its content. Without doubt one of the doctrines that pervades all of Erasmus' religious writings is the Pauline teaching on the body of Christ. That teaching is prominent in the *Enchiridion* of 1503 and recurs thereafter with insistence.[65] As developed by Erasmus, it correlates easily with many of the modes of his piety, for it aptly lends itself to elaboration on the *varietas* of calls within the church, it suggests the idea that each member does service for the whole, it corrects the more juridical understanding of the church prevalent in Erasmus' day, and it has firm roots in patristic writings on the subject. Most important perhaps, the doctrine implies a model for the harmonious co-ordination of all parts, an expression of the 'peace and concord' that was a 'summary' of the Christian message.[66]

That doctrine also relates intimately, as is obvious, to what has been called the christocentric nature of Erasmian spirituality. This christocentrism does not mean that Erasmus does not have an orthodox and clearly formulated trinitarian theology or that he slighted it, but that his christology provides an entry into his thinking on the trinitarian mystery. The Father and the Spirit play important roles for him, and his pneumatology is critical for a complete understanding of his theology.[67] Erasmus' teaching about Christ is, however, more pervasive and accessible, though no less complex. His synonym for the teaching that permeates *pietas* is, significantly, the 'philosophy of Christ.' Although the expression does not occur in the *Enchiridion*, Erasmus employs it as a key to understanding that document years later in his letter to Volz, a letter that remains its best and most authoritative interpretation.[68] Erasmus also speaks of 'celestial philosophy,' another synonym that this time points to the origins of what Christ taught; the Johannine resonances are clear.

Christ is, then, first and foremost a teacher, 'who has been sent forth from heaven,' as the *Paraclesis* informs us.[69] In many passages Erasmus leaves us with the impression, in fact, that it was by his teaching that Christ principally effected our salvation: 'in order to transmit [the celestial philosophy], he who was God became man.'[70] He boldly states in the *Paraclesis* that the philosophy itself is 'the restoration of human nature originally well formed.'[71] We miss in passages like these the Anselmian theory of atonement. Such passages must be balanced with others in which Erasmus relates how Christ 'in his triumph through the cross robbed hell of its plunder,'[72] and how we are baptized into his death. None the less, there is a decidedly sapiential cast to Erasmus' christology, which surely reflects his own conviction that teaching, by word and example, is the basic function for good that all leaders in society perform – parents, priests, and kings. 'The imitation of Christ' lies pre-eminently in teaching – Erasmus' own vocation, as we must not forget.

Christ is, however, different from all worldly teachers, for he does not teach quiddities and essences but truths 'about the happiness of man and the living of his life.'[73] More important still, his word has an inner and transforming force that other teachings lack. This was true of him in his person as the Word, and is also true of the word he left us in Scripture. Although Christ provides us with an example, he does much more than that for us through his teaching. By it he 'transforms' us and, by inference, saves us.[74] The 'philosophy' is itself salvific. Through that philosophy, moreover, we learn to crucify the flesh and be conformed in all things to Christ. Being conformed to Christ, being 'transformed' or 'transfigured' into him recurs as a prominent theme from the early days of the *Precatio ad Virginis filium Iesum* of 1499 until Erasmus' last years.[75]

We are conformed to Christ, however, not by our own efforts but by the power that is given us. The Christian is incorporated into Christ's death and first pledged to him by his baptism. Reflection on one's baptism and on the implications of baptismal vows plays a large role in Erasmian spirituality, as is clear from the *Enchiridion*.[76] Of all the sacraments, baptism receives the most consistent emphasis, though Erasmus never wrote a separate treatise on it as he did for matrimony and for penance. The basis for this emphasis is solidly Johannine and Pauline. As Payne has shown, on the other hand, all seven sacraments recognized by the church receive some attention from Erasmus, and he is traditional in seeing them as, under the proper conditions, instruments of grace. They are not, however, the only such instruments. In that respect, too, his teaching was quite traditional, even if perhaps his emphasis in certain sixteenth-century contexts was not.

Whatever may be said about Erasmus' position in the *De libero arbitrio* on the respective roles of grace and free will, he often expressed himself elsewhere on that issue in terms that Luther could have approved.[77] The problem is complex, not least of all because Erasmus generally eschews the technical language that would make his thought clearer. The metaphor of the Christian soldier in combat in the *Enchiridion*, for instance, helps obfuscate rather than clarify the issue.[78] There was, no doubt, a strong moralizing strain in Erasmus, and Stoic influences and vocabulary were everywhere present in his day. None the less, he was aware of the pitfalls of Pelagianism and did his best to avoid them. Taken in the large, his spirituality cannot be labelled Pelagian. The Christian was saved in and through the grace that Christ brought to earth and in no other way. It is in that grace that all our confidence must be placed.

As with so many other humanists, the theme of *meditatio mortis* appears often, and it is, as to be expected, the leitmotif of the *De preparatione ad mortem* in these volumes of *spiritualia*.[79] The expression derives from Plato, but Erasmus transforms it into a *meditatio beatae vitae futurae*.

This eschatological content of Erasmian *pietas* finds expression also in the recurrent theme of 'contempt of the world' – not understood in his mature years as a flight into the cloister but as a flight from the 'carnal,' the transitory, the purely material, and from everything that would merely indulge the senses. The Johannine and Pauline distinction between 'flesh' and 'spirit' runs through his work as almost a hermeneutical key, as Massaut observed, and they help structure his eschatology.[80] In that eschatology, however, we read nothing about the cosmic terrors of the 'last day,' the *dies irae.*

Much more could be said about the theological content of Erasmian piety. But after a certain point Erasmus himself is its best spokesman. One of his fullest and most systematic expositions occurs in the *Explanatio symboli,* and the best short précis of Erasmian *pietas* occurs in a letter of 1 November 1519 to Jan Šlechta:

> Besides which the whole of the Christian philosophy lies in this, our understanding that all our hope is placed in God, who freely gives us all things through Jesus his son, that we were redeemed by his death and engrafted through baptism with his body, that we might be dead to the desires of this world and live by his teaching and example, not merely harbouring no evil but deserving well of all men; so that, if adversity befall, we may bear it bravely in hope of the future reward which beyond question awaits all good men at Christ's coming, and that we may ever advance from one virtue to another, yet in such a way that we claim nothing for ourselves, but ascribe any good we do to God.[81]

If this is the philosophy of Christ, how is it translated into one's life – an important consideration, for the peculiar characteristic of this philosophy is that its integrity demands that it effect what it teaches. Thus, the hallmark of a 'theologian' from this school is that he teaches 'by his very life.'[82] His life is a 'sacred sermon.'[83] Erasmus lists the signs that manifest an appropriation of this philosophy/theology: one despises riches, does not avenge wrongs, regards those who mourn as blessed, comes to the aid of the poor, detests war, cherishes others as members of the same body, puts one's trust in God.[84]

To many of his contemporaries, and to later generations as well, this must have seemed a bland and rather inglorious description, for it did not set the practitioner of 'Christian philosophy' off from what was expected of the common run of Christians. Most spiritualities would assume these points as already attained and then map out more strenuous standards by which to 'scale the heights.' Erasmus' precise point was, on the contrary, that these *were* the heights, even for those vowed to what supposedly was beyond them.

Erasmus did recommend, however, certain practices as specifically conducive to the appropriation of the philosophy of Christ. His spirituality does not lack, therefore, what are conventionally termed 'exercises of piety.' He enumerates these in many places and they vary remarkably little, though some lists are more extensive than others. In *De vidua christiana* he recommends listening to sermons, conversation with devout and learned persons, reading pious works like the Fathers, and especially reading Scripture.[85] In the *Explanatio symboli* he adds the remembrance of Christ's passion, the reception of the Eucharist, prayers specifically for the dead, as well as almsgiving and other good deeds.[86] Remembrance of one's baptism and a few other practices are recommended elsewhere, and the *Enchiridion*, for instance, provides remedies against various temptations.[87] He was, moreover, respectful, especially with the passing years, of pious usages sanctioned by the long-standing tradition of the church, though not all of these played a role in his own recommendations.[88] On the other hand, as was perhaps too well known in his own day and later, he was scathing towards what he regarded as aberrant accretions to them, abusive reductions to practice, and all 'new' devotions that smacked of superstition.

Erasmus' recommendations are striking in their sobriety, their classical simplicity, and their acceptance of the best among the traditional practices of Christian piety. It is no wonder that in England in the 1520s and 1530s both Protestants and conservative Catholic families like the Poles could claim Erasmus' piety as their own.[89] It is also notable that the emphasis falls on sermons rather than on other parts of the liturgy and that there is relatively little mention of the sacraments. Nor does Erasmus mention fasting and invocation of the saints, even though he did not in principle altogether reject these. All of Erasmus' recommendations are similar to those proposed by Italian humanists of the quattrocento, and they can later be found in works of piety of the Counter-Reformation, where, however, significant additions would be made and one recommendation, absolutely central to Erasmian *pietas*, would begin to disappear or to be muted – the reading of Scripture.

SOURCES

This brings us to the sources from which Erasmus drew in order to formulate his philosophy of Christ, among which Scripture, especially the New Testament, holds pride of place. Within the New Testament, he showed a special preference for the Pauline corpus, and within that corpus the Epistle to the Romans, which first attracted his attention at the very time he was working on the *Enchiridion* and would remain important for him. He drew much from the Gospel of John. In the Old Testament he looked to the 'sapiential literature,' particularly the Psalms but also books of moralistic maxims like Proverbs and Wisdom.[90] This pattern correlates with his preference for Matthew among the Synoptic Gospels, for modern scholarship sees that gospel as 'a handbook of Christian conduct to be used by teachers.'[91] In principle, however, Erasmus refused to name one part of the Bible as superior to others, for it all had to be received with equal reverence, and it conveyed a message that did not contradict itself. Thus, one part could be used to explain what was unclear in another.[92] In *De immensa Dei misericordia*, he explicitly rejects the view that the Old Testament is not as much a testament of mercy as the New.[93]

Aquinas saw the Bible as essentially a book of doctrine and as the only 'proper' source for theology. It was the Creed writ large.[94] Up to this point Erasmus shared the same conviction, but then major differences begin. Out of the Bible Aquinas would mine the essential elements needed to establish a 'science' of theology. The underlying model is a 'science' like geometry or music.[95] In this enterprise the Bible was (put invidiously) a book of sacred information that provided the data for an intellectual construct.

For Erasmus, on the other hand, the Bible was the book par excellence of 'spiritual reading.' One had recourse to it, certainly, for validation of Christian dogma, but even that function could not be divorced from its role in fostering devotion, the constitutive element of genuine theology in Eramus' view. He tirelessly – and characteristically – castigated the scholastics for the 'frigidity' of their theology; and to Erasmus, of all the books in the world the Bible was the least frigid.

The *Paraclesis*, the most revealing document in Erasmus' entire corpus concerning what the Bible teaches and how it is to be regarded, was one of the prefaces to his Greek and Latin edition of the New Testament published by Froben in 1516. In his organization of the catalogue of his writings for Boece in 1530 he did not, however, include it in 'ordo sextus,' which contained his revised edition of the New Testament and his paraphrases on it, but located it in the 'fifth order,' works pertaining to *pietas*. His deliberate detachment of it from its original location and his placing of it where he did must be taken seriously when we consider the full scope of his spirituality.

The *Paraclesis* speaks enthusiastically of the teaching the New Testament contains, of how this 'philosophy' differs from all others, of how in it 'transformation is more important than intellectual comprehension.'[96] But the New Testament is more than all these. To read it is not simply to read the world's wisest and most exalted 'philosophy' or the world's most persuasive and eloquent document exciting to godliness. It is to encounter Christ himself. In it 'he lives for us even at this time, breathes and speaks, I should say, more effectively than when he dwelt among men.'[97] In it we find 'his living and breathing likeness.'[98] In it he is rendered 'so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon him with your very eyes.'[99] He is rendered present, therefore, not in his historical actuality, but as transcendent and transforming Word. Erasmus' philosophy of Christ reached no more sublime moments than these. In most emphatic and special ways, his was a 'biblical spirituality.'

When we examine the sources for that spirituality, therefore, we must do more than merely indicate the sources that he used. We must be even more intent upon how he used them and how he viewed their operation in the integral reality he meant *pietas* to be. This is necessary especially for the Bible, because of the unique character attributed to it, but also for his other sources as well. In fact, we fall into a kind of 'fallacy of sources' if we think that simply counting the number of times Erasmus refers to a given book or author automatically indicates the character of his own work or the tradition in which it stands.

With that consideration in mind, little can be added here to what has been suggested earlier about his appropriation of the Fathers. His knowledge of them staggers us even today, and his edition of their works represents a watershed in the history of patristic studies. More important than the influence upon him of any single doctrine that they espoused was the model for theological discourse and method that they embodied. As Christian expressions of the rhetorical tradition, they stood in his mind as polar opposites of the theologians of his day. Among other things, in that 'ancient and more genuine theology' there was no divorce between *eruditio* and *pietas*.

For all that, Erasmus' enthusiasm for the Fathers was not uncritical, nor was it antiquarian. He never abandoned the allegorical interpretation of Scripture that was generally characteristic of patristic exegesis, but he came to criticize even his beloved Origen's excessive use of it.[100] Just as his esteem for Cicero did not lead him to fall into 'Ciceronianism,' so his reverence for the Fathers did not lead him into believing that their teaching was to be transposed without qualification into the sixteenth century.[101] In *De tedio Iesu*, for instance, he rejects a christological explanation of Jerome and at least suggests that some of the scholastics were closer to the truth.

Erasmus proposed that many of the classics of Greek and Latin literature, like Cicero's *De officiis* and *De senectute*, could be read with spiritual profit. The ethical ideals and especially the style of such works surely influenced the content and style of his *pietas*.[102] He was deeply appreciative of the classics and of the role they could play for good. His enthusiastic invocation, 'St Socrates, pray for us,' should not be interpreted, however, as an indication that he perceived no difference between Christian and pagan sources.[103] He was perfectly and consistently clear on the transcendent character of the Bible and on the pre-eminence of the Fathers as interpreters of the philosophy of Christ.

None the less, the influence of other philosophies on the formulation of the philosophy of Christ cannot be doubted. There can be detected in it, sometimes without much effort, formulations and ideas that, whether or not Erasmus was always aware of it, are surely Platonic, Stoic, and Epicurean in inspiration. It could not, of course, be otherwise, given the impact of these schools on so many of the writings to which he was heir.

Study of the 'Epicureanism' of *De contemptu mundi*, however, has shown it to be traditional, and we cannot take exception to it in Erasmus unless we wish to be equally critical of many of the Fathers and many medieval writers.[104] The same could be said of the other philosophies that influenced Erasmus. In this regard as in others, his philosophy of Christ was irenic, but not syncretistic. Accommodating though he tried to be towards all that was good in the classical tradition, he realized that there was a point beyond which he could not go. When he self-consciously used these sources, he used them creatively and for his own purposes and never in slavish dependency upon them.

LITERARY FORMS

If the sources Erasmus used and the approach he took to them are important for understanding his spirituality, so are his literary style and the forms he employed. Especially in recent years scholars have pointed out that awareness of literary considerations is a prerequisite for understanding all aspects of Erasmus' writings.[105] In other words, content and doctrine are badly served if they are treated independently, for instance, of the genre in which they are encased. In *De libero arbitrio*, Erasmus seemed to refer to himself as a 'sceptic,' a remark that would cost him dearly in subsequent historiography. Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle has located this remark in the genre of the diatribe and thereby mitigated its sting.[106] Better understanding of the nature of the panegyric, the 'demonstrative genre' of rhetoric, has helped revise old generalizations about 'flattery' and 'double-talk.'[107]

Basic to all his writings, of course, was their relationship to rhetoric. Erasmus must be classified as an exponent of *theologia rhetorica*, to use the expression of Charles Trinkaus.[108] Dense though that expression is and susceptible to further analysis, it points even in its raw designation to the 'persuasional' character of Erasmus' enterprise. Rhetoric in the strict or 'primary' sense is the tool of oratory, of public discourse in an assembly.[109] Its aims are *docere, movere, delectare*. Erasmus' prose tries to embody and co-ordinate all three of these aims, whereas his scholastic contemporaries were concerned almost exclusively with the first, and that in a dialectical mode. That mode, central to their enterprise, was in fact inimical to *pietas*. More precisely, it was inimical to the pastoral dimension that marked Erasmian *pietas*. Erasmus wanted, while teaching, to persuade and please as well. To that extent his piety, although of course dealing with the soul's relationship to God, looked outward to the world of his fellows.

No one doubts that Erasmus was concerned with rhetoric. After a review of the works contained in the *spiritualia*, no one can doubt that Erasmus was concerned with ministry. What needs to be insisted upon is the correlation, the almost compelling compatibility, between these two aspects of Erasmus' enterprise. The most obvious articulation of the correlation is the *Ecclesiastes*, for the need to correlate classical rhetoric (oratory) with Christian oratory (preaching) was even more obvious to Erasmus' contemporaries than it is to us. For that reason they demanded of him an instrument of pastoral care along those lines. But rhetoric is broader than oratory and 'ministry of the word' broader than preaching from the pulpit, so that we can see the rhetorical impulse operative elsewhere, as in Erasmus' interest in catechesis, and even in his interest in the sacrament of penance, where the confessor and the penitent enter into colloquy with one another.

The compatibility between rhetoric and pastoral sensitivity reaches deeper, however, and extends beyond such specific instruments and form. The orator or rhetorician must by definition be in touch with the feelings of his audience and be responsive to them. If he lacks that ability, he will never successfully accomodate his message to those who attend to him, and he will therefore never 'move' them. The good shepherd of souls must cultivate the same responsiveness, otherwise his message, no matter how sublime, will rest inert and never reach the hearts of those for whom it was intended. Thus the fundamental truth of the orator's art tallies perfectly with a first principle of effective ministry. Both *rhetor* and *pastor* must engage all their efforts at 'moving' the persons with whom they are concerned.

The *rhetor*'s primary concern is of course some form of public discourse, whereas the pastor must sometimes be engaged at a different level as well. Erasmus himself has moments when he transcends the world of public discourse to enter a more intimate sphere. We must not forget that he began his career as a poet and that throughout his life he showed an appreciation for the allegorical – the 'poetic' – interpretation of Scripture. The language of the poet is evocative rather than exhortatory. It is more private than the language of the orator, and it often appeals to the emotions in a different way.[110] It looks more to affect than to action. It is contemplative, the language of the lover. When Erasmus speaks of *pietas*, words like *dulcedo, suavis, sapere, ardere*, and *inflammari* often occur, so that he approximates the language of the mystics.

What must be clearly recognized is that touching the emotions, either rhetorically or poetically, is not merely an aim of his spirituality but constitutive of its form. In that sense, the style *is* in the piety/theology/ministry, and it is anything but 'frigid.' In him, if in anybody, form and content cannot be separated. Once again we must reckon with the seamless robe of his *pietas*.

III

This review of the qualities, content, sources, and form of Erasmus' piety has shown, it is to be hoped, some of the gains in understanding it that have been won especially in the past twenty years. We see more clearly its parts and the integrity of the whole, and we can locate it somewhat more firmly in the traditions it appropriated, modified, or rejected. Erasmus thereby emerges as a compelling figure in the history of theology, piety, and ministry, where for so long he was denied his rightful place.

All questions have not been answered, and Erasmus' *pietas*, for all its accommodating quality – perhaps *because* of it – is not to everybody's taste. It has an elitist ring. Like so much of the humanists' enterprise, it implicitly and explicitly supports the *status quo* in its view of gender roles, class relationships, and society at large.[111] Is not the very moderation it inculcated a damper on ardent spirits? Some scholars detect an abiding monastic residue in it, which raises the question of how 'active,' how 'contemplative' it was in its most profound dynamics. Was it not, despite notably activist elements related particularly to ministry, still ultimately more supportive of *otium* than *negotium*?[112]

These and similar questions deserve attention. More pertinent for our purpose, perhaps, are questions about how Erasmian *pietas* relates to other spiritualities contemporary or subsequent to it. Our better understanding of Erasmus now needs to be located in the history of spirituality. Comparisons undertaken within a broad framework – not limited to point-for-point correspondences or divergences (as has been so often done in the past *vis-à-vis* Luther, for example) – should yield an even firmer grasp on what Erasmus was about.

Some recent studies on the relationship between Erasmus and St Ignatius, beginning with that by Marcel Bataillon, have been instructive in this regard.[113] While attempts to find a textual dependence of the *Spiritual Exercises* on the *Enchiridion* have been largely abandoned, though there are indeed some remarkable similarities in phrasing, we are today far removed from the earlier judgment that these two reformers are irreconcilably opposed. Some fundamental differences surely exist, but in other equally fundamental points Loyola seems at times almost to be translating Erasmus' ideals into the spirituality and posture of his order – suppression of 'monastic ceremonies,' no distinctive habit, primacy of ministry of the word, dedication to education and catechesis, and long years of study with a heavily humanistic component. This is not to argue influence but substantial compatability.

Influence is, of course, an altogether different question. For at least two decades Erasmus' writings had a massive circulation in the highest circles of European society, and many of them were translated into the vernacular. We have studies of this phenomenon and of the controversies Erasmus' works aroused.[114] But we still know little about the degree to which his ideas were accepted and assimilated or the degree to which they had an impact on the way institutions functioned and changed their appreciation of their role. In any case, it would be a mistake to assume that because of the general disfavour into which Erasmus fell in official sectors by the middle of the century the wide reception of his ideas and viewpoints by the previous generation failed to work an effect, even in the sensitive areas with which we are here concerned. Margo Todd has shown, for instance, that Puritan social thought in England owed much to his influence.[115] Moreover, the fact that his name is not mentioned, that no textual dependencies can be found, or even that a given author has not read his works does not mean that he is not present. Solid evidence exists, in fact, that one of his major works pertaining to the theory and practice of ministry had an immense influence. The *Ecclesiastes* established a new model for one of the most important genres of the age, treatises on preaching, with a consequent redimensioning of the aims and forms of the preacher's task,[116] although the authors of works on preaching after 1535 almost without exception give him no credit, and some surely were unaware that his was the model they were ultimately following. His dominating influence appears only with a review of the history of the genre.

In general, however, the history of pastoral genres in our period has failed, at least until quite recently, to attract the interest of scholars. Yet, for Protestant divines of the sixteenth century reform of ministerial practice was a central concern. Studies of the disciplinary decrees of the Council of Trent have shown that a reform of ministry, of the *cura animarum*, is the framework in which those decrees must be interpreted.[117] Within Roman Catholicism even old ministries came to be practised not only with renewed vigour but also with some modification of form and, it would seem, of *mentalité*.

There is no doubt that Erasmus' writings on pastoral care were symptomatic of the age. There is also no doubt that they were corrective of what he believed were current abuses in such care – the neglect of catechesis, the anxiety-inducing character of late-medieval manuals concerning confession and the lack of proper training and screening of the confessors themselves, a ministry to the dying rife with superstitious or quasi-superstitious practices, and of course inadequate theory and practice of ministry of the word. All these areas received great attention as the century wore on, but except for preaching we remain relatively ill informed about what changed and what failed to change and about Erasmus' possible influence.

We might note, on an even broader scale, that in recent years social historians have devoted a great deal of attention to the effects of the Reformation and especially the Counter-Reformation on 'popular culture.' While it has long been known how vigorously the Reformation waged a 'war against ignorance and superstition,' it has now become clear that the Counter-Reformation did the same with at least equal vigour. The gradual recognition that conducting schools with a strongly humanistic curriculum was a form of ministry is the best known manifestation of the phenomenon. Studies, largely directed to countries with a Catholic tradition, have also shown how earnestly this war was waged even outside the classroom.[118] Jesuits in France and in rural parts of Italy referred to their territories as 'our Indies,' and made unflattering comparisons of Europeans with distant 'pagan' territories.[119] The efforts to reduce illiteracy, to teach the elements of Christianity purified of superstition, to reform the often rowdy and irreverent confraternities, and to replace certain popular cults with others more in accord with official norms eventually had some success.

Accompanying the new study of this phenomenon has been a turnabout in assessing it. Some historians see the 'war against ignorance and superstition' as an assault on a reality that, for all its problems, was ultimately healthier and more 'natural' than its more sober, normative, and heavily moralistic replacement.[120] Be that as it may, the new ideal imposed upon society or embraced by it correlates in a remarkable degree, once certain particulars are examined, with what Erasmus articulated over the course of several decades more effectively and with greater diffusion than any other single person by far. His impact here can, of course, by the very nature of the case, never be measured, but it is not frivolous to suggest that it might well exist and be much more powerful than we have previously thought.

At this point not much more can be said about these large and complex issues, except perhaps to mention that, especially in Catholicism in the second half of the sixteenth century and beyond, 'spirituality' became a major industry. That age is the age, *par excellence*, of spiritualities. Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Avila are towering figures that eventually put Erasmus into eclipse. The printing press was a major factor in creating and sustaining the industry, and the presses flooded the market with writings on the subject. It is difficult to imagine that the extensive corpus of Erasmus' works pertaining to *pietas* and the extraordinary success of many of them at the very dawn of this development did not help set patterns, however dimly remembered or even consciously opposed.

IV

The works contained in this collection of *spiritualia* reflect all the characteristics of Erasmus' *pietas* described above, but they evince certain of them more decidely. The question of 'states of life' emerges strongly in works like *De contemptu mundi, De vidua,* the *Institutio christiani matrimonii,* the *Virginis et martyris comparatio,* the *Epistola consolatoria,* and, of course, the *Enchiridion.* That question, despite the perennial validity of certain aspects of it, is quite foreign to us today and seems in itself to betray Erasmus' conservative perspective on societal roles. Here we can only insist upon its sensitivity for his times and repeat that Erasmus must be taken as much at his word when he details not only the problems but also the blessings of virginity and celibacy for those who are truly called to those states as when he does the same for matrimony. For that reason, the *Comparatio* provides a counterbalance to the *Institutio christiani matrimonii.* Of particular interest in the *Comparatio* is Erasmus' extensive use of the Song of Solomon, the text from Scripture traditionally interpreted, especially from the twelfth century onwards, as describing the mystical nuptials of the soul with its heavenly spouse.[121] He has recourse to it also in the *Epistola consolatoria.*[122] In these passages we find a tenderness not usually ascribed to him. Although Joseph Coppens may be quite correct when he states that Erasmus never wrote a panegyric of virginity as he did for matrimony in his *Declamatio,* the *Comparatio* approximates one. There is no reason to agree with Telle that the *Comparatio* is insincere or a 'disguised condemnation of celibacy.'[123]

The marriage issue, however, keeps recurring. It is clear that for Erasmus it was 'd'une importance capitale.'[124] None the less, the *Institutio* still deserves the description Telle applied to it many years ago – 'cet ouvrage si inconnu.'[125] The work is daunting. It is one of Erasmus' longest works, the longest in the *spiritualia* except for the *Ecclesiastes.* It is complex and also comprehensive, for it deals not only with moral, spiritual, and theological problems related to marriage, but with thorny canonical and contractual questions as well. In that work, as in others, Erasmus subscribes to many of the conventional opinions of his age about the purposes of marriage and the relationship between the sexes, but his insistence on the mutuality of the relationship and his reservations about arranged marriages must not be forgotten.[126]

The *Institutio* did not, however, appear conventional to all of Erasmus' contemporaries. It was published shortly after the censure by the Sorbonne of the French translation by Louis de Berquin of Erasmus' *Encomium matrimonii*. Erasmus was accused, especially by Josse Clichtove, of attacking – among other things – the ideal of celibacy under cover of praise of marriage. In 1526 Erasmus was also the object of other attacks, and he was accused of being a Lutheran. This complicated situation has been carefully studied by J.-C. Margolin, who sees in the *Institutio christiani matrimonii* not a retractation by Erasmus but a courageous, more precise reaffirmation of positions that were being distorted by controversy.[127] It is also an enlarged treatment of a number of questions revolving around marriage, not least of all divorce. The work was, ironically as it turned out, dedicated to Catherine of Aragon.

The controversies over questions of the respective 'dignities' of celibacy and marriage have perhaps obscured what Erasmus was truly trying to do. He was correcting an imbalance in pastoral practice. Although the church officially recognized that sanctity was possible in all states of life, as the canonization of lay persons like Elizabeth of Hungary in 1235 and of Louis IX of France in 1297 undeniably indicates, the tendency in practice was to speak about religious life in a way that clearly seemed to imply the opposite. Moreover, the most popular works of piety, like *The Imitation of Christ*, postulated certain conditions of seclusion, even isolation, that could be fulfilled only within the cloister. Such assumptions were even stronger in works emanating from the Rheno-Flemish mystical tradition. The piety of lay folk was thus patterned after a style of life not theirs, most especially if they were married.

Erasmus tried to remedy this situation, first of all by reaffirming, obviously too emphatically for many of his contemporaries, that if a person were called to the married state, that state was 'best' for him or her even in the pursuit of godliness. No useless regrets, therefore. He repeatedly reminds his readers that marriage was instituted by God in the garden of paradise, sanctified by Christ at Cana, mirrored in the relationship between Christ and the church, and considered by the church to be a sacrament, as he indicates in his prayer 'Sub nuptias.'[128]

More important, he tried to construct a spirituality that was appropriate precisely for the married state, the state in which most persons found themselves. The 'being together' of the couple was not an obstacle to their holiness – as if the partners should try to live in silence and without the distraction of human love – but its very constitution and precondition.

Hence emerges his insistence on the mutuality of the relationship – 'animorum coniunctio' – and the help in piety that the spouses offer to each other.[129] Marriage is characterized 'mutuis obsequiis.'[130] His beautiful prayers regarding marriage are the quintessence of the spirituality he saw as appropriate for the spouses.

Given their aims, it is not surprising that 'women's issues' recur in works like the *Institutio* and *De vidua*, as they do also to some extent in the *Comparatio*, *Paean* and *Obsecratio*. Jennifer Roberts' comments about Erasmus' views on women in the introductory note to her translation of *De vidua christiana* are verified in the other works in this collection. On the positive side is his championing, for whatever reasons, of the rights of women to a literary education in *De vidua*, the *Institutio*, and elsewhere. Here, after all, is the key to their future. Erasmus' friendship with Thomas More probably influenced him in this stance,[131] and he would have found a gratifying vindication of it when the first English translation (1524) of his *Precatio dominica* was done by More's daughter Margaret when she was only nineteen or twenty years old.[132] It is also worth noting how many of the *spiritualia* were dedicated or addressed to women: the *Paean*, the *Obsecratio*, *De vidua*, the *Institutio*, the *Comparatio* and the *Epistola consolatoria*; the *Enchiridion* was supposedly written at the entreaties of one.[133]

To be fitted into this picture are the explicitly Marian pieces – the *Paean*, the *Obsecratio*, the Liturgy of Loreto, and one of the *Precationes*. They are all short, and the two most lyrical are the earliest. For a comprehensive view of Erasmus' mariology, all four of these pieces need to be compared with what he says in passing about the Virgin elsewhere.[134] It is interesting to note that in the *Obsecratio* he clearly subscribes to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.[135] We might speculate, moreover, that he would later want to qualify certain earlier statements, as when he says to Mary in the *Paean*, 'You alone can soothe the irate Judge,'[136] or when he addresses her in the *Obsecratio* as 'mea Servatrix.'[137] He later explicitly deplored what he himself does in the *Paean*, namely, apply a verse from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament to Mary.[138] One of the readings that he offers for his Loreto liturgy is in fact not such a passage, but rather the section from Ezechiel about the 'closed portal,' suggesting an allegorical interpretation of it as a prediction of Mary's virginity.[139] The 'Precatio ad Virginem Matrem' of 1535 is a remarkably concise and balanced statement that can stand as an index to his central and mature teaching on Mary.[140]

Three of these Marian pieces bear a relationship to the liturgy. This is obvious in the Loreto liturgy. Not so obvious is the underlying pattern of litany in both the *Paean* and the *Obsecratio*, in the former of which Erasmus utilizes or paraphrases several invocations like 'Tower of David' from the traditional litany honouring Mary.[141] Recourse to liturgical prayers is recommended in the *Modus orandi Deum* and *De praeparatione ad mortem*. In the *Modus orandi Deum*, it is worth noting, this great classicist suggested some possible use of the vernacular in the eucharistic liturgy.[142] The editor of the critical edition of *De praeparatione* believes that Erasmus made extensive use of the votive mass 'Ad postulandam gratiam bene moriendi' from the missal and also sections from the ritual for the visitation and care of the sick.[143] Be that as it may, it is clear that, directly or indirectly, liturgy figures in these *spiritualia*.

More pervasive is the general concern of these works with prayer or prayers. Imbedded in Erasmus' writings, moreover, are 'sample' prayers that he suggests for various persons and occasions, which have never been studied.[144] Like the 'Precatio ad Virginem Matrem' of 1535, many of the others stand, apart from their aesthetic and devotional qualities, as succinct summaries of Erasmus' thinking on various issues, as I suggested earlier for marriage. Peter Bietenholz remarks, for example, that Erasmus' prayer 'In gravi morbo' of 1535 is 'nothing less than the essence' of his *De praeparatione ad mortem*.[145] The 'Precatio ad Patrem' in that same collection stands in the same relation to the *Precatio dominica*, his long paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer,[146] as does the last section of the *Explanatio symboli*, which also deals with that prayer.[147]

Erasmus not only provides us with prayers and samples of how to pray, he also wrote the *Modus orandi Deum*. Despite what the title seems to suggest, the *Modus* is more a treatise about the nature and qualities of prayer (or prayers) and an incitement to it than a practical, 'how-to' manual. It is characteristically Erasmian in its scriptural foundation and in its admonitions about the correlation between prayer and the conduct of one's life,[148] but not in the long digression that is an apologia for various forms of the veneration of the saints.[149]

In comparison with the writings of others on the subject, especially from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, it is noteworthy that the *Modus orandi Deum* devotes little explicit attention to what came to be called 'mental prayer,' 'meditation,' or 'contemplation.' Correlatively, we do not find here anything about stages in prayer, a theme that would be prominent in writers like Teresa of Avila. But this work has never been systematically studied as part of the history of a genre. Indeed, popular though it was in Erasmus' day, running through ten Latin editions between 1525 and 1540, it has been little studied at all.[150] We must further note that the *Modus* is not to be confused, as is sometimes done despite the discrepancy in dates, with the *Briefve admonition de la maniere de prier* constructed by de Berquin and condemned by the Sorbonne in 1523, the year before the *Modus* was first published.[151]

The editor of the critical edition of the *Modus* refers to its 'caractère pastoral,'[152] a designation that could easily be extended to many or even most other works among the *spiritualia* but to few more obviously than to the *Catechismus* or *Explanatio symboli quod dicitur Apostolorum, decalogi praeceptorum, et dominicae precationis*. This is not the only catechism Erasmus wrote. Sometime before 1512 he composed in verse his brief *Christiani hominis institutum*, a rendering into Latin of the English of John Colet's *Catechizon*, for use in Colet's school in London.[153] Some scholars would add to this list, moreover, the colloquy *Inquisitio de fide*.[154] The *Explanatio* alone, however, would be enough to testify to Erasmus' interest in this form of ministry, which was just entering a new and extremely important phase. Luther's various catechisms, all of which preceded the *Explanatio* (but not the *Institutum*), were of course crucial in this regard, although recognition of the need to reactivate this form of pastoral care seems to have been widespread, even apart from Luther's successful initiatives.[155]

Luther scorned Erasmus' effort, but the *Explanatio symboli* was popular, having six Latin printings within little more than its first year.[156] Its diffusion, in no way comparable of course to that of Luther's catechisms, continued for some time, and the book seems to have been especially used by missionaries in Portuguese India and Spanish Mexico.[157] Rudolf Padberg suggested that it had at least an indirect influence on the *Catechismus Romanus* issued at the behest of the Council of Trent, but editors of that document discount the proposal since they have found no textual dependencies.[158] In any case, this 'abrégé de la théologie d'Erasme' both illustrates the doctrinal grounding of his *pietas* and indicates how he tried to translate it for practical use in a clearly determined form of ministry.[159] Erasmus postulates that catechetical instruction is different from its secular counterpart, for here Christ's Spirit 'begins and perfects' the work.[160]

The *Exomologesis* and the *Ecclesiastes* are the other two works among the *spiritualia* whose pastoral character need not be argued. The *Exomologesis* saw at least seven Latin editions and a French translation between 1524 and 1540. Without doubt intended as an antidote to the late-medieval confessors' manuals, it differs from that genre in form, message, and at least to some extent in audience. Erasmus states explicitly that he is writing for the laity, though it is obvious from the content that he also had the clergy in view.[161] Erasmus' effort to displace the juridical and expiatory emphasis of the manuals with an understanding of the consolatory and especially the therapeutic values in the sacrament is noteworthy.[162] The confessor must act as father and healer rather than as judge or master. He must be carefully trained and chosen. For the penitent Erasmus radically simplifies the examination of conscience and, moreover, endeavors to show him how to look at his motives and dominant passions instead of concentrating his attention on individual sins. Correct use of the sacrament will lead not to anxiety but to peace of soul and to the amendment of one's life.

Within a decade after the first edition of the *Ecclesiastes* in an immense printing of 2,600 copies, the work ran through nine other editions – some authorized, some pirated.[163] Like the *Exomologesis*, it too was an antidote to a late-medieval genre, the *artes praedicandi* of the scholastics. So thoroughly did Erasmus succeed here that that genre practically disappeared, making way for the great 'ecclesiastical rhetorics' that poured off the presses of Europe after the middle of the century. In the *Ecclesiastes* Erasmus supplied his contemporaries with the materials to construct alternatives to the styles of preaching advocated by the scholastics by instructing them in the homiletic style of the Fathers and the uses that could be made of classical rhetoric. Despite the many questions the work left unanswered and despite its daunting length and complexity, the *Ecclesiastes* was eagerly seized by his contemporaries and was surely, as I indicated earlier, the single most important work for the reform of preaching that the century knew. In it, moreover, we clearly perceive the relationship between ministry and *pietas* characteristic of Erasmus. As Marc Fumaroli observed so well concerning it: 'The essence of Christian eloquence consists in the piety that renders the heart docile to the imitation of Jesus Christ.'[164]

Erasmus' two sermons, or *conciones*, also fall into the category of pastoral forms. *De immensa misericordia concio* is far too long for actual delivery, even in an age accustomed to long sermons. The second sermon, inserted by Erasmus into the second edition (1525) of the Loreto liturgy for delivery during mass after the reading of the Gospel, is of appropriate length for such a circumstance.[165] The reason he gave for composing it for the new edition was 'ne non esset integra liturgia,' which shows a sense that preaching was a constitutive part of the liturgical action, not a grafting foreign to it.[166] The sermon bears, however, little relationship to the rest of the liturgy, even to the readings from Scripture, and is heavily moralistic.

Both these sermons deserve analysis from several perspectives, including Erasmus' departure from scholastic and other medieval forms and the alternative he provides for them.[167] *De immensa Dei misericordia*, however, is especially interesting for its content, written as it was in the same year as *De libera arbitrio* against Luther. In effect, and even explicitly, Erasmus equates *misericordia* with *gratia* in this sermon, and he therefore provides abundant material for an examination of his thinking on grace and related matters when not in an adversarial position.[168] When he says, for instance: 'Trust in the merciful one, and you will experience mercy,' he almost seems to echo his opponent of *De libero arbitrio*.[169] In Erasmus' prefatory letter to

Christoph von Utenheim he aptly describes the sermon as 'misericordiae encomium.'[170]

De tedio Iesu deals exclusively and professedly with a doctrinal issue, an aspect of the relationship between the human and divine natures in Christ.[171] Did Christ in the garden of Gethsemane fear his imminent death? Erasmus answers in the affirmative, and opposes Colet who, relying on Jerome, held the opposite view. The issue of the 'human consciousness of Christ' has in recent years been much discussed by theologians, so that Erasmus' position, which is closer to most contemporary thinking on the matter than Colet's, is not without interest.[172] Even aside from that, *De tedio* establishes that Erasmus addressed a technically theological issue early on, and did so with confidence and skill. In the words of G.J. Fokke, Erasmus here opposed 'docetist' tendencies in Colet, and he 'builds up a balanced christology, incarnate and transcendent at the same time.'[173] Since *De tedio* was written before the *Enchiridion,* it can be employed to interpret the christology found in it. Many years later Erasmus would take up again the issue of Christ's psychological sufferings in *De praeparatione ad mortem,* finding a pastoral application for them.[174]

That work is a humanistic adaptation of the medieval genre of the *ars moriendi.*[175] The subject continued to be popular long after Erasmus wrote, and the genre has figured in recent books dealing with the phenomenon of fear and pessimism in western Europe from the late Middle Ages into the eighteenth century.[176] Erasmus generally receives little attention in these studies, though *De praeparatione* ran through a score of Latin editions within seven years after publication and had a truly impressive number of translations and editions in the vernacular.[177]

De praeparatione also belongs to the genre of consolatory literature. If writings on death during these centuries fall into two general categories, as Jean Delumeau indicates – those written by 'partisans de la douceur' and those adapting tactics of 'pastoral terrorism' – Erasmus' treatise clearly belongs in the former.[178] It avoids the macabre and tormented in its elaboration of *meditatio mortis* and therefore can be seen as corrective of pastoral practice and of other manuals. Written in his old age, *De praeparatione* enunciates its purpose clearly and poignantly: 'As we ourselves await death, we have prepared this work of consolation for others who do the same.'[179]

V

After the foregoing discussion of the general character and influence of Erasmian *pietas* and some of its more salient features in the works that constitute the present collection of *spiritualia*, we can now turn our attention to the three treatises in this volume. The first of these works to be published, the one that has attracted the most scholarly and popular attention, and the one by far most widely diffused and translated, as Charles Fantazzi's introductory note well establishes, is the *Enchiridion*. Through the centuries students have often come to know Erasmus first, even exclusively, from its pages, and its importance can hardly be overestimated. The scrutiny to which it has been subjected has produced a number of debates over its interpretation.[180] Many of these debates pertain to the more general character of the Erasmian enterprise, and they have already been dealt with.

We might single out, however, one recent study, for it raises some basic questions. Robert Stupperich has argued that, although the *Enchiridion* was first published as part of the *Lucubrationes* of 1503, its importance emerged only with the Froben edition in 1518; the work did not become famous until its author had become famous.[181] Stupperich has provided a healthy caution, and he is quite correct in calling attention to the fact that only after 1518 did translations begin and the flood of Latin editions reach large proportions. None the less, the work already had eight printings before the Froben edition, sometimes as part of the *Lucubratiunculae*, sometimes independently. Moreover, by 1516 Erasmus could report to Thomas More, surely with some exaggeration but not without basis: 'My *Enchiridion* is universally welcome.'[182] In any case, by the middle of the century it had established for its time a unique printing history. Although no doubt it was enhanced by the reputation of its author, it had to possess intrinsic qualities as well to account for its enormous popularity.

Stupperich further argues, principally against Alfons Auer and Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls, that whatever those qualities might be, they were not theological. The *Enchiridion* is not 'a compendium of biblical theology,' not even a 'theory of piety.' The *Enchiridion* does not 'deal with theology but with the Christian life.' In this, he asserts, it resembles the *Imitation of Christ*, and the intentions of the two authors are practically identical.[183]

Again, Stupperich puts us on guard against enthusiasms to which the rediscovery of 'Erasmus the theologian' have led. On the other hand, even by the time Erasmus composed the *Enchiridion* he had discovered Origen and the Epistle to the Romans, and he had been deeply influenced by Colet and Vitrier. The *Enchiridion* is not a work of his maturity, true, but fifteen years later he felt confident in proposing it in his letter to Volz as an important articulation of his 'philosophy of Christ.' That 'philosophy,' as must be clear by now, was grounded in doctrine and theology – in a way, of course, peculiar to Erasmus, so that that grounding possibly escaped some of his contemporaries and surely escaped some later interpreters. Although the

Enchiridion does bear a resemblance to the *Imitation* on a few counts, its differences from that work are far more important than any superficial similarities. To compare it to the *Imitation* is to becloud its originality and is almost tantamount to comparing the *Ecclesiastes* with the medieval *artes praedicandi*.

In what did this originality consist? To discover it we must not look to Erasmus' specific recommendations, 'rules,' 'remedies,' recurring metaphors, or even underlying anthropology. Important though these are, they are by and large traditional and, lifted out of context, can be found in any number of works in circulation at the time. The traditional nature of these features surely accounts in part for the untroubled reception the *Enchiridion* at first enjoyed, but it does not account for its unprecedented popularity through several decades with such a wide variety of readers. This popularity indicates that contemporaries must have been convinced that this book offered them something that seemingly similar works did not. As indicated earlier, these works based their spirituality on celibate life in a cloister: when the author of the *Imitation* approvingly quotes Seneca to the effect that he never felt less human than when in the company of others, he pointed to a fundamental orientation that made his style of piety difficult to realize by most men and women.[184]

To understand the appeal of the *Enchiridion* we must look as much to form as to 'content' or to 'ideas,' especially when these are abstracted from the general framework of the book. The tendency of historians of theology and of spirituality to concentrate on content continues to lead to distortions in those disciplines, as if the teaching of Bernard and Aquinas on grace can be compared without taking into account the altogether different cultures in which they were encased. In trying to understand Erasmus, this tendency must be perhaps even more strongly resisted. Especially in him, form and content cannot be separated: *verba* and *res* are two quite imperfectly distinct aspects of but one reality.

The most obvious manifestation of the importance of form in Erasmus' *spiritualia* is the elegant yet easily intelligible Latin in which he expressed his message. By the time he wrote, enthusiasm for that style had captured much of the literate population of Europe, lay and clerical, even north of the Alps and south of the Pyrennees. There is no need to insist on how mightily this feature of the *Enchiridion* would recommend it, or how modern and appropriate to the times it would make even the most conventional ideas appear. At least outside Italy, no other contemporaneous work on piety possessed this 'literary ornament' in anything like the same degree.

One aspect of the literary form that the *Enchiridion* represents was the framing of the message in continuous discourse. This provided the reader with a sense of beginning, middle, and end and thereby conveyed a sense of literary unity that was missing in works like the *Imitation* that consisted in a string of aphorisms sometimes only loosely related to what preceded and what followed. Despite a somewhat arbitrary organization, the work possessed a certain coherence.

The *Enchiridion* purported to be not only coherent in exposition but also comprehensive in its scope. It did not focus on one problem or aspect of the Christian life, but tried to provide 'weapons' that would be useful in whatever circumstances the 'Christian soldier' found himself. It was in its own way a *summa* – or, as Erasmus called it, 'compendiariam quamdam vivendi rationem' – 'a kind of summary guide to living.'[185] Its provisions could of course be amplified, but as it stood it professed to equip its readers with all that was essential to Christian piety, much as Calvin would later claim for his *Institutes*, which he in fact terms in the language of his original title a *summa pietatis*.[186] Like that work, the *Enchiridion* prided itself on the simplicity, yet sufficiency, of what it enjoined. The popularity of both books suggests that they responded even in this claim to a need felt by contemporaries.

Erasmus ostensibly wrote the *Enchiridion* for a layman, and he stressed the truism that piety was available outside the cloister. His concern for nurturing the devotion of the great mass of the faithful, therefore, manifested itself early. Only later, after his own monastic vocation had come into clear crisis, the *Moriae encomium* had been published, and the Reformation had erupted, was this concern interpreted as an attack on the 'monks' and as a sign of his deviation from orthodoxy. The later controversies mask the fact that the *Enchiridion* appealed to many of the clergy and many members of religious orders and at moments seems addressed to them. The ideal it proposes should not be understood, therefore, as exclusively 'lay,' but as setting valuable norms for all Christians, even for those who lived in the tonsured or cloistered states. It was thus comprehensive in this way as well.

It might even be argued that the work would have a special appeal to clergy and religious because of the theological framework in which Erasmus set his recommendations about how the Christian life was to be lived. To describe the *Enchiridion* as being about 'the Christian life' but not about theology is to interpret it with a dichotomy Erasmus spent much effort opposing. While it is true that the *Enchiridion* is filled with ascetical and moralistic recommendations, Erasmus consistently relates them to a theological understructure. The *Enchiridion* proposes a *pietas* that rests in a general way on the doctrine of the baptismal vows, on incorporation into the body of Christ, on the inward power and sweetness of God's love, grace, and word, and it evinces an appreciation of Paul, Origen, and others that sets it off from works like the *Imitation*.

It differs in yet another way from the *Imitation* in proposing learning as the companion to prayer: they are the two chief 'weapons' in the Christian's armoury.[187] That learning is the fruit of humanistic reflection on classical, patristic, and biblical texts, which can be brought to bear upon the dignity of human life. It does not lodge merely in the mind but finally transforms the personality.[188] Scripture is its true measure. For those of his generation who wanted their *pietas* conjoined with theology – and there were many – Erasmus here begins to show the way.

The *Enchiridion* owes its popularity to a large degree, therefore, to the fact that in so many ways it was a 'first.' The theological interests and moral inspiration that had marked much of humanism from the beginning now found codification in a concise and easily intelligible handbook. It thus filled a gap and coincided in an altogether special way with the aesthetic and religious tastes of the day.

In his famous letter to Volz in 1518 (Ep 858) Erasmus looked back upon the *Enchiridion* with satisfaction, and he never thought any substantial revision or retraction of it necessary. It was, none the less, an early work. Even though in general Erasmus remained remarkably consistent in his opinions for somebody as prolific as he and so engaged with the learned discourse of his day, he did later modify or expand some of them.[189] When he wrote the *Enchiridion*, for instance, he was in the first and uncritical stage of his enthusiasm for Origen's allegorizing of Scripture, an enthusiasm that perhaps accounts for the stronger appearance of Plato in this work than is common in later ones. Erasmus' subsequent studies of the New Testament, moreover, helped him develop a more ample theology of the penetrating power of the word of God. From about 1518, probably due at least indirectly to Luther, he began to put more emphasis on the utter gratuity of grace and began to see *fides* less as intellectual assent and more as trust in God. Missing in the *Enchiridion*, moreover, is emphatic articulation of certain themes that he favoured in his later writings, especially those that have a societal dimension. The *Enchiridion* contains, for example, no impassioned denunciation of war, no dramatic plea for the 'Christian soldier' to work for peace and to cherish it almost above the most just war.

In the *Enchiridion* Erasmus gives dutiful attention to the force and prevenient character of grace, but the framework of spiritual 'combat' encases the work. The metaphor of the 'Christian soldier' had a long history even by the time he wrote, and too much should not be made of his employment of it.[190] It does not emerge with such prominence in any of his later writings, and outside the *Enchiridion* we cannot attribute it to him as a characteristic expression. The specific way he employs it in the *Enchiridion* does not contradict what he would have to say in subsequent writings about the horrors of war and the blessings of peace, but he perhaps perceived a certain incongruity that put restraints on his use of it.

Although in the *Enchiridion* he commends as part of Christian piety the succour of those in need, he does not develop this plea for the poor at any length, as he would sometimes later do so eloquently. He seems to have had the laity – or at least a general audience – principally in view as he composed the *Enchiridion,* and that fact probably accounts for how little he has to say about ministry, which would later much concern him. Sister Anne O'Donnell, in commenting on the relationship to the *Enchiridion* of Erasmus' edition in 1501 of Cicero's *De officiis,* observes: 'Cicero's outlook is social and civic; Erasmus', personal and religious.'[191] She is quite correct, but social and civic, as well as ecclesial, concerns would emerge more clearly later.

In fact, not only are such concerns muted in the *Enchiridion,* they at times seem displaced with insinuations that the 'Christian soldier' flee them. The *Enchiridion* is rife with admonitions about the dangers of 'the world,' and Erasmus shows himself sympathetic to his addressee's desire to abandon life at court with all its enticements.[192] It is true that (in contrast with the early chapters of *De contemptu mundi*) he rejects the definition of 'world' as life outside the cloister.[193] It is also true that he insists that those who find themselves in public office execute their duties not for their own advantage but for the good of their subjects. None the less, he does not energetically promote the idea that such office is to be sought or betray that he views it as much more than a burden to be borne courageously. Some strains of Italian humanism, for instance, would be more positive in this regard than Erasmus ever was.[194] His friend and fellow humanist Thomas More would show himself in his *Utopia* more sensitive to this aspect of Christian commitment.[195]

Erasmus does not, therefore, propose a Christian engagement with the world or, further, see that world as a field 'ripe for the harvest.' Evangelization does not much emerge as a concern. Erasmus emphasizes, moreover, the primacy of the invisible over the visible, of the eternal over the temporal. For all its originality, the *Enchiridion* is related to the tradition of *contemptus mundi.*

His work that bears that title appears in this volume in its first modern translation into English. Not published until 1521, it has long been a *crux interpretum* because of the peculiar nature of the final chapter, which seems to be almost a retractation of the unqualified praise for monasteries that precedes. That chapter is so different from the others, in fact, that it led to widespread – though disputed – speculation that it must have been added later.

Marcel Haverals' recent discovery of a manuscript of the book written between 1502 and 1513 now provides the first documentary evidence pointing towards a solution of the controversy.[196] That draft does not contain the final chapter, so that we can reasonably infer that neither did the original composition undertaken about 1488/9 in the monastery of Steyn when Erasmus was about twenty years old. As Erika Rummel shows in the introductory note to her translation, we cannot pinpoint precisely when the last chapter was added, but it was surely no earlier than 1502 and possibly as late as 1521. That chapter was, therefore, either almost contemporaneous with the *Enchiridion* or, more likely, postdates it by some years.

Haverals' discovery does not merely add a bit of information to our Erasmian chronology but enables us to see *De contemptu mundi* in a different light. We can now interpret it as a significant autobiographical statement. Those who argued that the final chapter was part of the original composition based their position in part on the fact that qualifications about the excellence of monastic life were sometimes found in similar works on the subject, and claimed that Erasmus was here simply following convention: he did it only for 'practice in writing,' which is how he described the origins of the work in his letter prefatory to the *editio princeps* of 1521.[197] Once we concede that the last chapter was added later, however, we can see in it personal reservations about monastic discipline that correspond to Erasmus' own vocational crisis. We must also accept that the earlier chapters truly reflect his views at the time they were written, even though they correspond so neatly to received wisdom and may not have been as deeply felt as his later reservations. We must, therefore, also subject Erasmus' description of *De contemptu mundi* as a stylistic exercise to the same cautions appropriate to his statement that the *Enchiridion* was 'born of chance.'[198] The descriptions are true, but not fully adequate.

There is now good reason to suppose that the final chapter represents a development in Erasmus' thinking. It represents a disillusionment, true, but also a step towards a wider vision. It corresponds to his own later experience of the cloister, but it also represents a better understanding of the meaning of 'world' in the texts of the New Testament. Erasmus had already expounded that broader understanding in the *Enchiridion*. An underlying warning of the *Enchiridion*, moreover, is that undue trust is not to be put in 'ceremonies,' an adaptation of Pauline admonitions about the irrelevance of circumcision and Jewish dietary prescriptions. In Erasmus' own day it was 'the monks' who, in his opinion, placed exaggerated emphasis on cinctures, cowls, and cloister, too little on compunction of heart. Personal experience and the study of biblical and patristic texts converged to forge in him around 1503 a better understanding of 'world,' an altogether critical moment in the articulation of Erasmian *pietas*.

Was Erasmus' disillusionment with monastic life justified? Was he disillusioned not because the monasteries were not living up to their religious ideals but because he sought from them something they were never intended to deliver? Did he, in fact, expect to find in Steyn a kind of 'institute for advanced study,' and did his disappointment spring not from the monks' lack of piety but from their ignorance and from the constraints the monastic *horarium* placed upon his own pursuit of learning? Probably no one can satisfactorily untangle the motivations 'deep down' of an author dead some four hundred years, especially not someone so complex as Erasmus. About all that can be said with certainty is that in time Erasmus became convinced that his own vocation as writer and scholar could not be effectively exercised in the monasteries as they existed in his day, that he saw learning and piety as mutually supportive, that he also saw that monastic piety was not only not normative but was in fact the exception to the rule and held dangers peculiar to itself, and that the 'monks' of his day needed reformation not so much in their discipline as in their very understanding of what their way of life was all about.

A warning, however, is in order. We should not indiscriminately lump together what Erasmus in his many writings has to say about 'monks' with what he says about mendicant friars like the Dominicans, Carmelites, and Franciscans. With these latter he had special quarrels, particularly concerning their style of theology and their practice of ministry. It was this group, in fact, that produced some of his bitterest opponents and who felt most keenly the sharp blade of his criticisms. 'Monastic theology' had, after all, a certain affinity with his own, and at least in theory, monks did not engage in ministry. Many of Erasmus' criticisms applied to both monks and friars, but some of his most caustic only to the friars.

In any case *De contemptu mundi*, like the *Enchiridion*, became popular almost immediately. The Amsterdam edition of the critical text lists seventeen Latin printings before 1540, the date of the Froben edition of the *Opera omnia*.[199] The work was translated into English by Thomas Paynell in 1533.[200] Whereas the popularity of the *Enchiridion* can be explained in part by a certain originality of the genre itself, the popularity of *De contemptu mundi* must be partly ascribed to the appeal of one that was well established. Erasmus reworked the genre, however, in ways that would appeal to his age, especially in his use of classical sources, as Rummel points out below. By that single device he engaged in the recurring debate about the propriety of classical learning for Christian piety and landed on the side proponents of the new learning could only applaud. In its entirety, moreover, *De contemptu mundi* dealt with a subject that fascinated Erasmus' generation, the relationship of piety to states of life, and in the final chapter he echoes ideas found in his popular *Enchiridion* as well as in other writings about the same time.

Erasmus cast his *De contemptu mundi* in the form of a letter, though he described it to Johann von Botzheim in 1523 as a 'declamation' that was written 'in praise of monastic, that is, solitary, life.'[201] The work does not appear, however, in the catalogue of his writings appended to that letter, written in the year when the popularity of the work was just beginning to accelerate. In the catalogue of 1530, on the other hand, *De contemptu mundi* appears prominently in the *ordo quintus*, right after the *Enchiridion*, which heads the list.[202]

In the Amsterdam edition, Sem Dresden has provided an important discussion of the genres of 'declamation' and of *epistola hortatoria* as they relate to *De contemptu mundi*, and has thereby drawn our attention once again to the importance of form for those who would interpret Erasmus correctly.[203] As a 'genre ... fictive' and as an 'exercice scolaire,' the declamatory form raises questions about just how literally true are certain of the scenes and details that Erasmus presents; until 1981, even Erasmus' sincerity in expounding the principal theme of the first eleven chapters could be doubted. Dresden quite correctly points out the literary, not historical, character of the former and refuses to doubt the sincere character of the latter. We must remember that Dresden wrote his commentary before Haverals' discovery of the crucial manuscript. He nevertheless argues for a later date for the final chapter, while at the same time stressing certain continuities in Erasmus' thoughts on 'the world.'[204]

Erasmus' admonitions about the dangers of wealth, the pleasures of the flesh, and the honours of the world and the inevitability of death would recur again and again in his later writings. He would later, however, try to relate those themes more directly and consistently to Scripture and would especially see death in more Christian terms. He would be much less inclined to prescribe the cloister as a sure antidote for worldly dangers, as a lifestyle that almost of its own force 'makes wicked men good and good men better.'[205] He would surely qualify his grudging admission: 'I approve of marriage, but only in the case of those who cannot live without it.'[206]

Erika Rummel's discovery of Erasmus' dependence upon Eucherius, a fifth-century bishop of Lyon, is important. It answers many questions about the model Erasmus followed for a long section of the work, and thereby much advances our knowledge of his sources and the way he reworked them. It vindicates, moreover, the strongly patristic inspiration of the *De contemptu mundi*, not recognized even in the Amsterdam critical edition. It assures us that already as a young man Erasmus was rummaging through works of the Fathers, thus anticipating his explicit espousal later of their 'more genuine' theology.

De vidua christiana, dedicated to Mary of Hungary, the recently widowed sister of Emperor Charles v, was first published in 1529. It enjoyed two further printings that year, seemingly the last independent editions of the Latin text. It was eventually translated into Czech (1595), Dutch (1607, 1860), and Spanish, but never into English until now.[207] It remains one of Erasmus' least well diffused works, and it has been altogether ignored by both older and contemporary scholars. The pages that Emile Telle devotes to it are the exception to the rule; unfortunately, those pages must be received with the same reservations required for his more general interpretation of Erasmus on related topics.[208]

Jennifer Roberts describes below the occasion that prompted the writing of *De vidua*, which fits into the constellation of works that Erasmus dedicated to the emperor and his relatives. Without doubt, Erasmus curried the favour of these powerful figures. He obviously welcomed Johann Henckel's suggestion in his letter of 18 July 1528 that he write something for Mary, for he seems to have set about the task rather soon. Henckel's letter also inspired the topic. He reminded Erasmus that he had written the *Institutio christiani matrimonii* for the 'queen-spouse,' Catherine of Aragon, and had thereby produced something helpful for all spouses. Now he should write for this 'queen-widow' – for the benefit of all widows.[209]

In 1527, just a year or so before Erasmus received Henckel's letter, he published his edition of the *Opera* of Saint Ambrose, to whose *De viduis* he explicitly refers in his own treatise.[210] The letter probably sent Erasmus back to that work. Widowhood was so unusual a subject that we are almost forced to attribute some of Erasmus' inspiration to Ambrose, which would demonstrate once again the patristic influences on him.

Aside from the subject itself, the two works have some other similarities – similarities lacking in the related works by Jerome and Augustine.[211] By and large Ambrose and Erasmus deal with the same personages, and in both instances these are taken almost exclusively from the Bible. Erasmus in fact makes a point of using such figures as his examples.[212] Ambrose and Erasmus extol many of the same virtues, almost inevitably. More important, both authors deal with the relative merits of different states of life. Ambrose seems to speak for Erasmus on this delicate subject when he says: 'We are taught that the virtue of chastity finds a threefold expression – in marriage, in widowhood, and in virginity. We should not so preach one of them that we exclude the others. They each are appropriate to those professing them.'[213] It would be difficult to construct a more concise and accurate summary of Erasmus' teaching on the matter, especially once we make allowance for his attempt to correct what he saw as excessive attention in pious literature to the excellence of virginity. True piety, Erasmus once again insists in this treatise, is possible in any station in life.

The influence of Ambrose seems all the more probable when we compare Erasmus' *De vidua christiana* with his *Oratio funebris* for Berta Heyen, written about 1489.[214] Berta was a widow for the last fifteen years of her life, and Erasmus in his title to the oration describes her simply as 'vidua probissima.' The circumstances of Berta's life provided Erasmus with a good occasion to elaborate on the subject of Christian widowhood, but he does not do so in any explicit fashion. This piece in fact bears little relationship to his treatise for Mary of Hungary.

Although Erasmus seems, therefore, to have been inspired by Ambrose's work, he develops the subject very much in his own way. Specific dependencies in phraseology and elaboration of ideas are difficult to locate. Erasmus' treatise follows an entirely different sequence and is far longer than Ambrose's. Thus Erasmus has room to expand on issues that Ambrose only touches upon and considers many that Ambrose does not deal with at all. The circumstances of Mary's widowhood offered Erasmus a chance to discourse on the evils of war. Since it was addressed to a member of a ruling family, *De vidua* also allowed him to insist that 'Christian philosophy' was intended for rulers as well as subjects and to repudiate the idea – with which the name of Machiavelli was to become synonymous – that Christian virtues were incompatible with political office. These ideas, which had earlier roots in the 'mirror of princes' literature, were by 1529 well-established Erasmian themes.

Broadly speaking, *De vidua christiana* falls into the 'mirror' genre. In the sections that specifically address Mary, it is not without its consolatory purpose, despite Erasmus' disclaimer.[215] None the less, the main body of the piece belongs to the genre of the *specula*, and it is thus a companion piece to the *Institutio principis christiani* composed in 1516 for Mary's brother, the future emperor, and it even resembles the *Panegyricus* that he published in 1504 honouring her father. In this instance, however, he extends the genre beyond royalty bereaved to include all women who have lost their husbands, as Henckel had suggested to him. He will accomplish his purpose, as he says, by way of 'an image placed like a painting before the eyes.'[216] The image is an idealized construct of the Christian widow.

To accomplish this purpose he reviews the stories of great widows of the Bible – Judith, Naomi, Anna, and others. The fact that he draws from both Testaments for his ideal indicates the Christian perspective of his exegesis even of the Old Testament. He holds all these women up for admiration and takes their lives as occasions for lengthy moralizing on a wide variety of virtues. The *speculum bonae viduae* is an exercise in so-called epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric, the 'art of praise and blame.' Erasmus thus contrasts good widows with bad widows, placing the latter in a contemporary context. Although he is never without interest, some readers will find him here at his most tiresome. His argument for the most part deals with virtues and vices, perhaps because he believed that female readership would not appreciate more lofty, more theological themes.

It is important to note, however, that Erasmus did write the treatise expressly for women and on a theme of particular interest to them. Caught as he was in many of the prejudices of his day, in this way as well as others he sometimes rose above them, as Jennifer Roberts indicates. Moreover, while Erasmus directly addresses widows, the admonitions that he delivers and the pattern of life that he advocates range beyond that category to be applicable to other women, especially mothers and spouses. Indeed, in sections of the work one can detect a kind of asceticism or spirituality for both parents, the first teachers to their children by word and example of 'the philosophy of Christ.' The principal duty of both father and mother is to inculcate right values in their offspring.

Not surprisingly, Erasmus devotes a fair number of pages to exegesis of the first sixteen verses of chapter five of the First Epistle to Timothy, the longest statement on widowhood in the New Testament.[217] Noteworthy here is Erasmus' recognition that in the apostolic period widows formed a special class of church workers and enjoyed official recognition as called to a *ministerium* – a word Erasmus does not hesitate to use, though it has no direct warrant in the Pauline text. Ambrose comments on this chapter of Timothy in his *De viduis*, but says nothing on this issue – nor do Jerome and Augustine.

Even in this relatively late work, Erasmus still bases many of his reflections upon the allegorical senses of Scripture. He characteristically defines the gift of 'prophecy' as an understanding of the mystical meaning of the text.[218] He goes so far as to espouse the view that every single letter of the sacred text holds a hidden meaning.[219] As was pointed out earlier, Erasmus never meant to attack the allegorical method as such; in this work the great philologist uses it extensively.

Like the treatise itself, the influence of *De vidua christiana* remains unstudied. Never translated until now into a major European language, it would have been accessible for the most part only to widows like Mary who knew Latin or who were told about its contents by confessors and spiritual directors. We must infer, at least for the moment, that it had little influence. It is true that in the Counter-Reformation a number of widows emerged to special prominence in church life – Jeanne Françoise de Chantal, Louise de

Marillac, Madame Acarie, to name only some of the best known. At present there is no evidence to suggest that Erasmus' treatise had any impact on this development. For those seemingly few widows who did have access to it, however, *De vidua christiana* provided an exposition of Erasmian *pietas* especially adapted to their station in life.

JWO'M

This page intentionally left blank

THE HANDBOOK OF THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

Enchiridion militis christiani

translated and annotated by

CHARLES FANTAZZI

One must not take Erasmus too literally when in the *Catalogus lucubrationum* he says in a self-effacing tone that the *Enchiridion* was born of chance (*res est casu nata*).[1] Rather, the germination and maturation of the work in the mind of its author can be traced to some extent in his peregrinations and personal encounters between the early months of 1499 and the publication of the *Lucubratiunculae* in February 1503.

Through the good offices of his friend Jacob Batt, Erasmus had gradually ingratiated himself into favour with Anna van Borssele, lady of Veere, and in the early part of February 1499 he was a guest briefly at the castle of Tournehem, where Batt was established as the tutor of the young Adolph of Burgundy, lord of Veere, Anna's son. Erasmus then returned to Paris and there wrote an edifying 'Epistola exhortatoria ad capessendam virtutem' for Adolph, which would later be published at the head of the *Lucubratiunculae*. Already in this brief epistle the note of lay piety is present in the words of admonishment to the young boy that Christ's teaching is not only for priests and monks (Ep 94:107–9). Erasmus reinforces his exhortation with prayers to Jesus and the Blessed Mother instinct with both learning and devotion.

In the summer of 1499, profiting still from his prolonged *congé d'études* from the monastery of Steyn, Erasmus travelled to England in the company of his friend and student, William Blount, Lord Mountjoy. He resided for a time in Oxford and here began his enduring friendship with John Colet, whose lectures on St Paul must undoubtedly have had great influence on his thought at this time.

He returned to Paris in February of 1500 and gave himself diligently to the study of Greek. When the plague broke out in the summer of that year, Erasmus fled to Orléans, but by the following year he was once again in Paris. At the insistence of Batt he continued to write rather fawning letters to prospective patrons in the vicinity of Tournehem and Saint-Omer. During this stay in Paris, Erasmus published his first annotated edition of a classical work, Cicero's *De officiis*. In the preface he urges the addressee, Jacob de Voecht, to carry 'this tiny dagger' (*pugiunculus*) about with him always, quoting a saying of Menander that 'virtue is mortal man's mightiest weapon' (Ep 152:41–4 and notes). Earlier in this same letter (line 22) Erasmus had used the Greek word *enchiridion*, which has the two meanings of 'dagger' and 'handbook.' It is evident that in using this word again in the title of his treatise a few years later he wished to exploit its double-edged connotation, although in the context of the military metaphor the more concrete sense must have been uppermost in his mind.[2]

Fleeing the plague yet again in the spring of 1501, Erasmus took refuge first in Holland and then with his friend Batt in Tournehem. He continued his assiduous study of Greek and also began work on the *Enchiridion*. In the summer he took up more permanent residence at the Benedictine monastery of St Bertin at Saint-Omer, about twelve miles from the castle of Tournehem. In the neighbouring Franciscan convent Erasmus made the acquaintance of its controversial warden, Jean Vitrier, a famous preacher, whose enthusiasm for St Paul and Origen impressed itself deeply upon him. Sometime during the fall of 1502 Erasmus accepted an invitation to spend the winter at the castle of Courtebourne, about thirty miles from Saint-Omer. As he set to work in this retreat he sent to St Bertin for copies of Augustine and the homilies of Origen, which inspired many a passage of the *Enchiridion* (Ep 165:9).[3]

The final phases of composition were completed at Louvain in 1502 and the work was published with several other pieces in February 1503 by Martens. In December 1504 Erasmus sent the entire *Lucubratiunculae* to John Colet with an illuminating personal estimation: 'The *Enchiridion* I composed not in order to show off my cleverness or my style, but solely in order to counteract the error of those who make religion in general consist in rituals and observances of an almost more than Jewish formality, but who are astonishingly indifferent to matters that have to do with true goodness. What I have tried to do, in fact, is to teach a method of morals, as it were, in the manner of those who have originated fixed procedures in the various branches of learning' (Ep 181:53–9). In this same letter to Colet Erasmus mentions the work on Paul's Epistle to the Romans that had occupied him for many years and his discovery of the wellsprings of the science of theology in Origen. Much later, in his famous letter to Dorp in defence of the *Moria*, Erasmus reiterates this estimate of his work: 'In the *Enchiridion* I laid down quite simply the pattern of a Christian life' (Ep 337:94–5).

As his book became more widely known, Erasmus expressed his satisfaction with its favourable reception. To Thomas More he recounts with delight: 'My *Enchiridion* is universally welcome; the bishop of Basel [Christoph von Utenheim] carries it round with him everywhere – I have seen all the margins marked in his own hand' (Ep 412:26–8). Praise came from all sides. In making a list of Erasmus' works for his brother, Adrianus Cornelii Barlandus cites the *Enchiridion* first, 'a small book of pure gold, and of the greatest use to all those who have determined to abandon the pleasures of the body, to gird up their loins for the life of virtue and make their way to Christ' (Ep 492:25–8).

The full title of the treatise as it appeared with three companion pieces in the *Lucubratiunculae* reads: *Enchiridion militis christiani saluberrimis praeceptis refertum contra omnia vitiorum irritamenta efficacissimis et ratio quaedam veri christianismi*, that is, 'The handbook of the Christian soldier, replete with most salutary precepts of much efficacy against all the allurements of vice, and a model of true Christianity.' The *Lucubratiunculae* were reprinted by Martens in Antwerp in 1509, and then with the title of *Lucubrationes* by Schürer in Strasbourg in 1515, 1516, and 1517. The first independent edition of the *Enchiridion* was printed by Martens, this time in Louvain, in June 1515; Valentin Schumann produced an edition in August 1515, which was reprinted in 1516. Thus by 1518 there were eight printings of the *Enchiridion* in all.

In a letter to Froben dated 12 March 1518 Erasmus dryly reports that he has sent him the *Enchiridion,* and that if he should find it of no use, he may pass it on to Schürer (Ep 775:16). In July of 1518 it was published, 'virtually reborn in Froben's types ... much more elegant and correct' (Ep 858:635), with the long dedicatory letter to Volz and the addition of Erasmus' translation of St Basil's commentary on Isaiah. Essentially it is the same as the original text with only minor corrections and revisions. This new edition gave great impetus to the further printing and diffusion of the *Enchiridion,* so that in the next ten years alone forty editions appeared. By the end of the century there were more than seventy editions of the Latin text and an extraordinary number of translations, which began to appear soon after the publication of the Froben edition.

The first translation into a vernacular language is a Czech version, done by Oldřich Velenský, and published in Bělá pod Bezdězem on 16 December 1519.[4] This was followed by a German translation printed in Basel in 1520, the work of Johann Adelphus, town physician of Schaffhausen, which was revised in the following year by Leo Jud, Protestant curate from Einsiedeln. In 1525 a translation into Low German was published by Hieronymus Fuchs in Cologne.

Next in chronological order were a Dutch translation published in Amsterdam in July of 1523 and another almost contemporaneous with it in Antwerp. The first is a free reworking of the original, while the second is scrupulously literal. The Amsterdam version was subsequently reprinted fourteen times between 1540 and 1616.[5]

The Spanish translation of the *Enchiridion* that issued from the press of Miguel de Eguía, printer in Alcalá, had a popular success without precedent in the history of Spanish printing up to that time. The translator was a famous preacher, Alonso Fernández de Madrid, canon of the cathedral of Palencia and archdeacon of Alcor. It first appeared in the spring of 1525,[6] with a dedication to the archbishop of Seville, Don Alonso Manrique, inquisitor-general. With such a translator and such a patron the book had a most auspicious beginning. After a second printing in the summer of the same year, Juan Maldonado reported to Erasmus that thousands of copies were being sold and that the printers could not keep up with the multitude of buyers (Ep 1742:174–6). The translator himself wrote exultantly in a letter of 13 November 1527: 'In the court of the emperor, in the cities, in the churches, in the convents, even in the inns and in the streets there is no one without a copy of Erasmus' *Enchiridion* in Spanish' (Ep 1904:17–19). While the treatise found much favour, it also stirred up fanatical opposition among certain sectors of the clergy. A letter of Juan de Vergara sent from Valladolid on 24 April 1527 (Ep 1814:107) testifies that war had been openly declared against Erasmus by the monks there, and that from the vernacular version of the *Enchiridion* more enemies had arisen than the warriors that sprang from the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmus. None the less, there were twelve reprintings of the Spanish translation before 1556, one of them published in Coimbra for Portuguese readers and the last two in Antwerp.[7]

The first French translation, published in Antwerp in 1529, is attributed to Louis de Berquin, a nobleman associated with the famous circle of Meaux, which was centered around Bishop Guillaume (II) Briçonnet and included such figures as Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, Guillaume Farel, and Martial Mazurier, who desired a return to evangelical simplicity. De Berquin's writings, among which were translations of Erasmus' *Encomium matrimonii* and the *Querela pacis*, had already earned him the condemnation of the Sorbonne and eventually resulted in his burning at the stake in the Place de la Grève in 1529. The difficulty with this attribution is that the translation is inexpertly done, 'consciencieux, mais pas très habile,' as Margaret Mann Phillips remarks, conjecturing it to be the work of an impoverished student.[8] On the other hand, the fact that the book was reprinted by such distinguished printers as Pierre de Vingle in 1532 and Etienne Dolet and Jean de Tournes in 1542 argues for a reputable authorship. Abbé Raymond Marcel conjectured that after his temporary release from prison in 1523, deprived of his books and in possession of an inferior edition, de Berquin made this translation at the home of his friend François Vatable in the chateau of Rembures, and that it was then issued in Antwerp as 'un hommage rendu à la mémoire de Berquin au lendemain de son martyre.'[9]

The Italian version of the *Enchiridion* was from the hand of Emilio de' Migli, chancellor of the city of Brescia. In a letter to Erasmus of 4 May 1529 (Ep 2154), he asks the author's permission to translate the work into the Tuscan tongue, saying that all were clamouring to see it in print – monks, preachers, and cultured ladies. The response was not long in coming. On 17 May (Ep 2165) Erasmus gave his enthusiastic approval and expressed his desire that other works might be translated into the vernacular. It is interesting that for prudence' sake he advised the translator to omit the letter to Volz and to soften certain passages that might arouse controversy. *Una piccola armatura per lo soldato christiano* first appeared in Brescia in 1531, and four successive editions were published in Venice before 1543. Giovanni Angelo Odoni, a young humanist from Abruzzi living in Strasbourg under the tutelage of Martin Bucer, assured Erasmus in a long letter written in the spring of 1535 (Ep 3002:612) that the book was being purchased and eagerly read by Italian admirers.[10]

At least two English translations are known to have been made in the 1520s, one by William Tyndale and the other by Thomas Artour, a Norfolk divine summoned to recant his heretical beliefs before Cardinal Wolsey in 1527. The latter version, according to E.J. Devereux, may have served as the basis for an anonymous translation edited by John Gough in 1561.[11] On Tyndale's translation we have the testimony of John Foxe: 'But then did he translate into Englishe a booke called as I remember *Enchiridion militis Christiani*. The which being translated, delivered to his maister and Lady.'[12] At this time (1521–3) Tyndale was a member of the household of Sir John Walsh at Little Sodbury. When he set out for Germany in May 1524, Tyndale left copies of the translation with the London merchant Humphrey Monmouth, but they were subsequently burned as being heretical.[13] Thus it is difficult to determine whether this is the translation published by Wynkyn de Worde for the reforming printer John Byddell on 15 November 1533. Devereux is inclined to believe, without adducing any proof, that the style suggests Tyndale, but after a careful stylistic study Anne O'Donnell finds no convincing argument for this attribution. She considers that at most it may represent Tyndale's 'apprentice-work as a translator.'[14]

The 1533 edition bears as its title: 'A book called in latyn Enchiridion militis christiani and in Englysshe the manuell of the christen knyght, replenysshed with moste holsome preceptes made by the famous clerke Erasmus of Roterdame, to the whiche is added a newe and marvaylous profytable preface.' A thoroughly revised edition, demonstrating a more literal fidelity to the Latin original and presumably the work of another hand, was published on 12 February 1534. The title is now rendered more concretely as 'The hansome [ie ready to hand] weapon of a christen knyght.' Four more editions (1538, 1541, and two in 1544) were printed for or by Byddell, reflecting more and more in their terminology the religious changes brought about by the Act of Supremacy. Then follow an edition by William Middleton, which has not survived, one by William Powell (1548), and two that were edited by John Day (c 1551). An Elizabethan edition was prepared by William How for Abraham Veale in 1576. In addition to these editions of the complete work, an abridgment was made by Myles Coverdale in 1545 and another by Graham Gough, independent of Coverdale's, in 1561.[15] Gough, pastor of the traditionally radical parish of St Peter's in Cornhill, London, who claimed not to know the author of the treatise, made use of the text to support his own popular, biblicistic reform. The *Enchiridion* was not published again until 1686 for William Rogers.

A Polish translation of 1558 and translations into Swedish (1592), Hungarian (1627), and Russian (1783) attest to the widespread and continuous popularity of the work. There are modern translations: by A.J. Festugière into French with an excellent introduction, by Werner Welzig into German, and by Juliusz Domański into Polish.[16] In addition to the reprinting of the 1533 English translation (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis terrarum 1909), there have been several recent translations into English, which can only be described as lacunar, inaccurate, and untrue to the Erasmian mode of expression.[17]

For this translation I have used the 1519 Schürer edition, which I have found to be singularly correct, in preference to the modern edition by Hajo Holborn.[18]

CF

TO THE REVEREND FATHER IN CHRIST DOCTOR PAUL VOLZ, MOST RELIGIOUS ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY COMMONLY CALLED HUGSHOFEN, FROM DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, GREETING.[1]

It is true, most worthy Father, that I have begun to be less dissatisfied with the small book entitled *Enchiridion militis christiani*, which I wrote long ago to please no one but myself and one quite uneducated private friend,[2] now that I see it approved by you and others like you; for being yourselves endowed with pious learning and with learned piety, I know that you would approve of nothing that is not equally pious and learned. But now it almost begins to satisfy me, when I see it so often printed already[3] and still in demand as though it were a novelty – if what the printers tell me is not entirely flattery. But then again I am often made uncomfortable by the pointed comment of a learned friend some time ago, humorously uttered, but I fear with as much truth as it had humour, that holiness of life is more noticeable in the book than in its author. And I find this harder to bear, because the same thing has happened in the man whose improvement was the chief object of my labours: so far is he from tearing himself away from life at court that he is plunged more deeply in it every day. How much piety this shows I do not know, but in any case, as he himself admits, it is a very great misfortune. Yet I am not wholly sorry for my friend, inasmuch[4] as fortune herself may teach him one day to repent, though he has been reluctant to take my advice. But I myself, though I strive always to reach that goal, have been assailed by my evil genius with so many mischances and so many storms that compared with me Homer's Ulysses might be mistaken for another Polycrates.[5]

And yet I cannot altogether regret this work, if it encourages so many people to the pursuit of true piety. Nor yet do I feel myself open to attack from every quarter if I do not live up as I should to my own precepts. For one thing, it is an element of goodness to have a sincere desire to be good, nor do I think that one should reject a heart that is sincerely devoted to such thoughts, although its efforts are sometimes unsuccessful. This must be one's first purpose all one's life long, and repeated attempts will one day succeed. A man who has really learnt the way has a good part of a complicated journey already behind him. I am therefore unmoved by the jeers of some men I could name who despise this small book as unlearned and the kind of thing that any schoolmaster could write, because it handles no Scotistic problems,[6] as though nothing could show true learning without them. Penetration I can do without, provided there is piety. It need not equip men for the wrestling-schools of the Sorbonne if it equips them for the tranquillity proper to a Christian. It need not contribute to theological discussion provided it contributes to the life that befits a theologian. Why deal with the questions that everyone deals with? On what else do our swarms of students spend their time? There are almost as many commentaries on the *Sentences*[7] as you can name theologians. Of makers of summaries there is no end;[8] one cannot count them – mixing this thing and that over and over again, and like the men who sell drugs making old out of new, new out of old, one out of many and many out of one all the time. How can a mass of such volumes ever teach us how to live, when a whole lifetime would not suffice to read them? It is as though a physician were to prescribe for a patient who is acutely ill that he should read right through the works of Jacques Desparts[9] and all the books of others like him, in hopes of finding what will restore him to health. Death will come upon him meanwhile, and he will be past human aid.

Life flies so fast that we must have a present remedy within our reach. Countless are the volumes they fill with their precepts on restitution, confession, vows, scandalous behaviour, and endless other things! And while they discuss everything in the smallest detail and define every point as though they distrusted the intelligence of everyone except themselves and indeed put no faith in Christ's mercy – they lay down precisely what he owes in the way of reward or punishment for every action – yet they never agree among themselves, and sometimes do not even explain the point clearly if you consult them in more detail. So great is the variety in men's natures and circumstances. Furthermore, suppose that they have defined everything truly and correctly, not to mention the tedious and frigid style in which they deal with these questions, how few men have the leisure to read through so many tomes? Who can carry the *Secunda secundae* of Aquinas round with him?[10] And yet the good life is everybody's business, and Christ wished the way to it to be accessible to all men, not beset with impenetrable labyrinths of argument but open to sincere faith, to love unfeigned, and their companion, the hope that is not put to shame.[11] Lastly, by all means let eminent rabbins,[12] who must always be scarce, pore over these great tomes; but none the less we must take thought all the time for the unlettered multitude, for whom Christ died.[13] He has already taught people the leading part of the Christian religion, who has fired them with the love of it. That wise king,[14] bringing up his son to true wisdom, takes not a little more pains in encouraging than in teaching him, as though to love wisdom were already close to having acquired it. It is a disgrace to do this in the eyes of lawyers and physicians, two kinds of men who have deliberately made their art as difficult as they can, that at the same time they may win richer profits and greater glory among the ignorant; but how much more disgraceful thus to have treated the philosophy of Christ. On the contrary, it is right to strive for the opposite, to make it as easy and as open to all men as we possibly can; and our object should be not to show off our own attainments but to attract as many as we can to the Christian life.

At this moment war is preparing against the Turks,[15] and whatever the intentions of those who started it, we must pray that it may turn out well, not for a chosen few but for all in common. But what do we suppose will happen if, when we have beaten them (for I do not suppose we shall slaughter them to a man), to persuade them to embrace Christianity we set before them the works of Ockham and Durandus and their like, of Scotus and Gabriel and Alvaro?[16] What will they think, what will their feelings be (for though nothing else, they are at least human beings), when they hear these thorny and impenetrable thickets of argument – instances, formalities, quiddities, relativities – particularly when they see so little agreement on them among those eminent religious teachers that they often fight each other until they are pale with fury and reduced to insults and spitting and sometimes even to fisticuffs? There are the Friars Preacher battling at short and long range for their precious Thomas; the Minorites on the other side defending their most Subtle and Seraphic Doctors,[17] shield linked with shield, some speaking as nominalists and others as realists. What if they see it is such a difficult subject that there can be no end to the discussion, what words we should use in speaking of Christ? Just as though you were concerned with some demon very difficult to please, whom you will have called up for your own damnation if you make any slip in the prescribed form of words, and not really with a most merciful Saviour, who demands nothing from us except a pure and simple life. I ask you, in heaven's name; what good will such things do, especially if this self-confident doctrine finds its counterpart in our character and way of life? If our noise and bustle, worse than any tyrant's, give them a clear idea of our ambition, if from our rapacity and lechery and oppression they learn how greedy and profligate and cruel we are, how can we find the effrontery to urge Christ's teaching on them, which is so infinitely different from all this? We shall have found the most effective way to defeat the Turks, once they have seen shining forth in us Christ's teaching and example, once they realize that we are not greedy for their empire, we have no thirst for their gold and no desire for their possessions, but seek nothing at all beyond their salvation and the glory of Christ. This is the true and genuine and effective theology, which long ago made proud philosophers and unconquered monarchs bow the knee to Christ. If this and this alone could be our purpose, Christ himself will be at our side.

Nor does it make sense to prove ourselves truly Christians by killing as many as we can, but by their salvation; not by sacrificing to Orcus[18] many thousands of the infidel, but by turning as many as we can of those infidels into believers; not by cursing them with terrible execrations, but by praying religiously that heaven may send them salvation and a better state of mind. If we cannot put our hearts into something of the sort, we shall degenerate into Turks long before we convert the Turks to our way of thinking. Suppose the chances of war, which are always doubtful, fall in our favour, the result may extend the kingdom of the pope and his cardinals; it will not extend the kingdom of Christ. His realm can never flourish until religion and charity and peace and innocence are in flower; as we are confident will happen under the leadership of our excellent Leo the Tenth, if his zeal for what is best is not swept in another direction by the tide of human affairs. Christ declares himself the champion and prince of the kingdom of heaven;[19] but there is nothing grand in this unless heaven is triumphant. For Christ did not die in order that the riches, the abundance, the armaments, and all the fuss and fury of an earthly kingdom, which were once in the hands of pagans, or at least of lay princes not so very far from paganism, should now belong to a limited number of priests.

In my own opinion it will be found a good plan, long before we make the attempt by force of arms, to seek to win them by letters and by pamphlets. What sort of letter, you ask? No threats, no bluster; they must breathe true fatherly affection and recall the spirit of Peter and Paul, they must not merely have the word 'apostolic' in the superscription, they must revive the activity of the apostles. I am not ignorant, of course, that all the springs and sources of the Christian philosophy are enshrined in the books of evangelists and apostles; but the expression is alien and often confused, and the figures and turns of speech are out of the way, and this makes them so difficult that even we often have to toil quite hard before we understand them. It will be the best plan, therefore, in my opinion to entrust to a number of men both saintly and scholarly the task of reducing into brief compass the whole philosophy of Christ, out of its purest sources in evangelists and apostles and its most generally accepted expositors, in a simple but none the less scholarly fashion, short but clear. What concerns the faith should be set out clause by clause, as few as possible; what relates to life should also be imparted in few words, and those words so chosen as to make them understand that Christ's yoke is easy and confortable and not harsh; to make them understand that they have acquired fathers and not despots, shepherds not robbers, and are invited to accept salvation and not dragged by force into slavery. They are human beings, as we are; there is neither steel nor adamant in their hearts. It is possible that they may be civilized, possible they may be won over by kindness which tames even wild beasts. And the most effective thing of all is Christian truth. But those to whom the Roman pontiff chooses to delegate this task will be instructed at the same time not to diverge in any way from Christ our pattern, and at no point to consider the affections or desires of men.

Something of this sort was taking shape in my mind after a fashion when I was working on this *Enchiridion*. I could see that the common body of Christians was corrupt not only in its affections but in its ideas. I pondered on the fact that those who profess themselves pastors and doctors for the most part misuse these titles, which belong to Christ, for their own advantage; to say nothing for the moment of those whose fiat, yes or no,[20] keeps all human affairs in perpetual flux, and at whose faults however obvious it is scarcely permitted to let fall a sigh. When all is dark, when the world is in tumult and men's opinions differ so widely, where can we take refuge, if not upon the sheet-anchor of the gospel teaching? Is there any religious man who does not see with sorrow that this generation is far the most corrupt there has ever been? When did tyranny and greed lord it thus widely or go thus unpunished? When was so much importance ever attached to ceremonies? When did iniquity abound with so little to restrain it? When did charity wax colder? All we appeal to, all we read, all we hear, all our decisions – what do they taste of except of ambition and greed? Our plight would be sorry indeed, had not Christ left us some live coals of his teaching, some living unfailing rivulets from the spring of his mind. What we must do is this: abandon the cinders offered us by men and blow up those coals of his into flame (I gladly use Paul's word[21]); follow up those rivulets until we find the living water that springs up to life eternal.[22] We explore the bowels of this earth of ours to get the ores which feed our vices;[23] are we never to mine the rich lodes of Christ, to win thence the salvation of souls? The winter of our wickedness never brings so low the fire of charity that it cannot be rekindled from the flint. Christ is our Rock;[24] and this rock has in it the seeds of heavenly fire and veins of living water. Abraham long ago dug wells in every country, seeking veins of living water; and when the Philistines filled them with earth they were dug anew by Isaac and his sons, who, not content with restoring the old wells, dug new ones besides.[25] Again the Philistines set up strife and opposition; but he does not cease to dig.

Nor are we quite free of Philistines nowadays, who get more pleasure from earth than from fountains of living water – those people, I mean, who reek of earthly things and twist the gospel teaching to serve earthly appetites, compelling it to be the slave of human ambition and to enhance their own discreditable gains and their despotic rule. And if some Isaac or one of his household should dig and find a pure source, at once they are all protests and objections because they know this source will be an obstacle to their gains and block their ambitions, even though it makes for Christ's glory. It is not long before they throw earth into it and stop up the source by some corrupt interpretation, driving away the man with the spade, or at the least so befoul the water with mud and filth that he who drinks from it gets more dirt and filth than liquid. They do not wish those who thirst after righteousness to drink from the crystal spring but take them to their trampled cisterns,[26] which are full of rubble and contain no water. But the real sons of Isaac – Christ's true worshippers, that is – must not grow weary of this labour. For those who tip earth into the gospel springs wish to be thought to be of their number, so that now it is by no means safe to teach the pure faith of Christ among Christians. So much have the Philistines grown in strength, fighting for earth, preaching earthly things and not the things of heaven, human things and not divine – those things, in fact, which tend not to Christ's glory but to the profit of those who traffic in indulgences,[27] in compositions, in dispensations, and suchlike merchandise. And this traffic is all the more perilous because they give their greed a façade of great names, eminent princes, the supreme pontiff, even Christ himself. And yet no man more truly forwards the business of the pontiff than he who publishes in its pure form the heavenly philosophy of Christ, of which the pope is the principal teacher. No man does princes better service than he who sees to it that the condition of the people is as prosperous as possible and that they suffer as little as possible from tyranny.

But at this point someone from the serried ranks of our universities will protest: 'It is easy to lay down in general what we should aim at and what we should avoid; but how in the mean time are we to answer those who need advice about what has happened and may happen?' In the first place, human affairs take so many shapes that definite answers cannot be provided for them all. Secondly, circumstances vary so widely that, unless we know what they are, any definite answer is impossible. Last but not least, I rather doubt whether those who deal in principles can give a definite answer; they differ about so many points among themselves. And the more intelligent ones of that sort do not usually reply 'This you must do; do not do that' but 'This is in my view the safer course; this I regard as tolerable.' If only we have the single eye filled with light of which the gospel speaks,[28] if our minds are like a house with the lamp of true faith set on a lampstand,[29] these minor points will easily be scattered like a mist. If we have Christian charity like a carpenter's rule, everything will easily be set straight by that. But what will you do if this rule disagrees with the accepted tradition of centuries and the conduct laid down by princes in their laws? For even that not seldom happens. Do not condemn what is done by princes in the execution of their duty; but conversely do not sully that heavenly philosophy of Christ by confusing it with the decrees of man. Let Christ remain what he is, the centre, with several circles running round him.[30] Do not move that central mark from its place. Those who are nearest Christ – priests, bishops, cardinals, popes, and those whose business it is to follow the Lamb wherever he may lead them[31] – should embrace the intense purity of the centre and pass on as much as they can to those next to them. Let the second circle be for the lay princes, who with their armies and their laws serve Christ after their fashion, whether in a just war they defeat the enemy and preserve the public peace or by lawful punishments keep crime in check. And yet, since of necessity they deal with business which involves the dregs of society and worldly affairs, there is a risk that they may let things go too far: that they might fight a war not for the public good but for their own advantage, that in the name of justice they may use severity even against men who might have been cured by mercy, that under the pretext of absolute power they may pillage the people whose interests it was their duty to protect.

Moreover, just as Christ like a source of eternal fire draws the order of priests close to him and as it were kindles them and purifies them from all earthly contagion, so it is the duty of priests, and especially of those in the highest stations, to summon princes, as far as they can, to themselves. If a war threatens, popes must use all their efforts, either to secure a settlement without bloodshed or, if the tempest in human affairs make that impossible, to urge that the war is fought with less cruelty and does not last long. In the old days, even when criminals were justly condemned, bishops used their authority to appeal for them, and sometimes rescued a criminal from the hands of his judges, as Augustine openly records in his letters.[32] For there are some things very necessary to the ordering of a state which, even so, Christ either accepted in silence or rejected, or neither approved nor disapproved but as it were connives at them. He does not recognize the coin of Caesar and his superscription; he orders tribute to be paid if it is due, as though the question did not much concern him, provided that what is owed to God is paid to him.[33] The woman taken in adultery he neither condemns nor openly excuses, only tells her to go and sin no more.[34] On those condemned by Pilate whose blood he mingled with their sacrifices Christ expresses no opinion, whether they suffered this fate rightly or no; he only threatens a similar fate to all men if they do not repent.[35] Moreover, when asked to arbitrate in the division of an inheritance, he openly refuses the task,[36] as though to decide about such mundane things were unworthy of himself, who must teach heavenly things. On the other hand, there are some things which he openly abhors. On the Pharisees for their greed, on hypocrites, on rich men in their pride he calls down woe.[37] Never does he rebuke his apostles more sharply than when they are assailed by a desire for revenge or by a feeling of ambition. When they asked whether they should call down fire from heaven to burn up the city from which they were shut out, 'Ye know not,' he said, 'what spirit ye are of.'[38] When Peter tried to turn him back from the cross into the world again, he calls him Satan.[39] When they were disputing about which of them should be first, think in how many ways and how often he recalled them to the opposite point of view![40] There are some things also which he openly teaches and prescribes: not to resist evil, to do good to our enemies, to be gentle at heart, and more of the same kind.[41]

We must make distinctions in these things and set them each in its proper place. Let us not therefore without more ado make Christ responsible for the actions of princes or lay magistrates, or ascribe them, as they say nowadays, to a divine right. They handle a certain amount of worldly business that has no part at all in Christian purity; and yet this must not be criticized, because it is necessary for the conservation of society. It is not their business to see that we are good, but to make us less bad and to reduce the amount of harm that bad men can do to the common weal. We therefore owe them their due honour, because as far as they can they promote divine justice and the public peace, without which even the province of piety is sometimes thrown into confusion. They must be honoured where they perform their duty and put up with perhaps where they use their power for their own advantage, lest something worse arise in their place. For even in these there is a subdued image, a shadow rather, of divine justice; which ought however to shine forth much more distinctly and visibly and in greater purity in the character and the legislation of priests. A reflection is one thing in polished steel and another in the glass of a mirror. In a third circle let us place the common people all together, as the most earthy portion of this world, but not so earthy that they are not members of Christ's body just the same. Not only the eyes are members of the body, but shins too and feet and privy parts. These must be given more indulgence, but in such a way as to invite them, as far as possible, to follow the things that Christ approves. For in this body what was once a foot may become an eye. And yet, just as princes, if they are wicked, should not be aroused by savage attacks, for fear that if provoked they may cause more grievous trouble, as Augustine remarks,[42] so the people in their weakness must be tolerated and fostered with paternal indulgence, following the example of Christ, who so gently tolerated and fostered his disciples, until by degrees they grow to maturity in Christ. For piety like other things has its infancy, it has its periods of growth, it has its full and vigorous adult strength. But every man according to the measure that is given him must strive upwards towards Christ. Of the four elements each has its appointed place. But fire, which has the highest station, gradually sweeps all things into itself and transforms them so far as it may to its own nature. Water it evaporates and turns into air, and air it rarefies and transforms into itself. Paul makes many concessions to the Corinthians, distinguishing for the time being what ideal he would set before those who are perfect in the Lord's name and what indulgences he would allow to the weaker brethren in his own name; but always in the hope that they may make progress. Over the Galatians he broods a second time until Christ take shape in them.[43]

If now someone thinks that this circle is more suitable for princes, there will be no serious difference of opinion between us. For if we observe their characters, we shall hardly find Christians more rudimentary than they; I speak of the majority, but not of all.

Whatever is outside the third circle is abominable, whenever and wherever it appears. In this class are ambition, love of money, lechery, anger, revenge, jealousy, slander, and the other plagues. These however do not become incurable until they make themselves respectable under a mask of religion and duty and worm their way into higher circles: when, for example, we exercise tyrannical power under a pretext of justice and right, when we make religion an excuse for personal gain, when we seek worldly rule in the name of defending the church, when laws are laid down which purport to serve Christ's cause and in fact are poles apart from the teaching of Christ. And so it must be impressed upon all men that there is a goal towards which they must strive. And there is only one goal: Christ, and his teaching in all its purity. If in place of this heavenly goal you set up an earthly one, the man who strives to make progress will have nothing to which he can rightly direct his efforts. The highest must be set before everyone, that at least we may achieve something halfway.

And there is no reason to excuse any walk of life from pursuit of this goal. The perfection of Christ lies in our desires, not in our walk of life; it is to be found in the spirit, not in clothing or in choice of food. Among monks there are some who are barely included in the outermost circle; and yet I speak of good men – but of weaker brethren. Among those who have married twice[44] there are some whom Christ thinks worthy of the first circle. Nor is it at the same time an insult to any calling in life if that which is best and most perfect is held up to all alike. Do we suppose that Plato insulted all existing city-states when in his *Republic* he put forward as a pattern such a polity as had never yet been seen? Did Quintilian show contempt for the entire profession of orators when he composed the pattern of such an orator as had never yet existed? Are you far from your exemplar? This does not mean rejection; it is a stimulus to progress. Are you fairly close? This tells you to come even nearer. For no one has ever gone so far that there is no room for further improvement.

Every single walk of life has certain special risk of degeneration related to it. The man who points these out casts no slur on that class of men; he does them a service. The prosperity of princes runs a risk of tyranny, of folly, of flattery, of moral decay. He who points out that these must be avoided is a benefactor to princes as a class. He means no reflection on that majesty of which they are so proud if he shows them wherein the true majesty of princes is to be found, if he reminds them of the oath they swore at their accession, of their duty to their people and to its magistrates. The princes of the church are exposed as a rule to two plagues in particular, avarice and ambition. As though he foresaw this, that first shepherd after Christ warns bishops to feed their flocks and not rob them or shear them close; not to feed them with an eye to improper gain, but with a free and willing heart; not to play the tyrant over those under them, and to urge them on the path to piety by setting an example, not by threats and orders.[45] Will a man who points out how bishops become truly great and powerful and rich therefore be thought to reflect on the clergy? The monastic profession, moreover, is often dogged, besides other distempers, by superstition, pride, hypocrisy, and slander. And so he does not immediately condemn their way of life who tells them where true religion is to be found; how far from pride is true Christian piety; how far from pretence is real charity; what strife there is between genuine religion and a poisonous tongue – particularly if he shows what must be avoided with the moderation which blames no individual and criticizes no order. Is anything in human affairs so prosperous that its particular pests have never been attached to it? And so, just as a man who points out the things by which true health is damaged or preserved promotes and does not hinder the health of the body, so he who demonstrates the corruptions of true religion and their remedies does not discourage the religious life but rather spurs on others to adopt it.

For I hear that certain people so interpret the principles of this small book, since they give less weight to ceremonies than those would wish who give them too much, and much to human regulations, as turning men's minds away from the monastic life. So true is it that one can express nothing cautiously enough to prevent bad men from seizing on it as a base for calumny or a handle for sin, so that it is scarcely safe to give good advice any more. If one discourages the wars which we have been fighting for some centuries now for worthless objects in a worse than gentile spirit, one is blackened with false accusations of sympathy with those who say that Christians must never go to war. For we have made the authors of this view heretical because some pope appears to approve of war. But there is no black mark for him who disregards the teaching of Christ and his apostles and sounds the trumpet for a war, regardless of the reasons. Should a man point out that it would be in the true spirit of the apostles to bring the Turks over to religion by the resources of Christ rather than by force of arms, he finds himself at once suspected of teaching that when Turks attack Christians they must by no means be restrained. If a man praises the frugal life of the apostles and makes some criticism of the luxury of our times, there is no shortage of people to accuse him of favouring the Ebionites.[46] Should he urge on married couples with some emphasis that piety and mutual understanding are a better cement for their union than the physical relationship and that the purity of wedlock should approach as near as possible to virginity, he is suspected of thinking with the Marcionites that all sex must be foul.[47] Should he maintain that in disputes, and in theological disputes especially, there should be no desire merely to win, no obstinate defence of one's position, no theatrical desire to show off one's powers, he is wrongly traduced as opposed to universities altogether. When St Augustine says that students of dialectic must avoid a passion for disputation,[48] he is not condemning dialectic; he points out its besetting sin, that we may avoid it.

Again, suppose one were to criticize the topsy-turvy judgment of the public, who give first place among the virtues to those of least importance, and conversely among the vices condemn most strongly those which are most venial as though they were the worst, and the reverse; one is taken to task at once as though one were in favour of the vices which one subordinates to something worse and condemned virtuous actions to which one prefers others as nearer to sanctity. If one said, for example, that it would be safer to trust to good works than to papal dispensations, one is not condemning his dispensations in any case, but preferring what according to Christ's teaching is more reliable. In the same way, if one said that those who stay at home and look after their wives and children do a better thing than those who go off to inspect Rome, Jerusalem, or Compostela,[49] and that money spent on these long and dangerous journeys would more piously be distributed to the deserving poor, one does not condemn their pious ambition but puts it second to something nearer to true piety.

Again it is not confined to our own times to condemn certain vices as though no others existed, while flattering others as though they were not vices, when in fact they are the more outrageous class of the two. Augustine complains in his letters that lechery is the one offence imputed to the clergy in Africa, while the vices of avarice and drunkenness are almost counted to their credit.[50] One offence we exaggerate in tragic fashion as the last degree of horror – to handle the Lord's body with the same hands that have touched the body of a whore. There are even people who dare assert in public in dramatic tones that it is a lesser fault for a woman to have connection with a brute beast than with a priest. The man who refutes their impudence is not thereby instantly in favour of unchaste priests, but he points out that factors have been neglected which should be given greater weight. A priest may be a gambler, a warrior or a swordsman, quite illiterate, wholly immersed in secular business, devoted to carrying out criminal orders from criminal princes: they do not protest so loudly against him, although as he handles the holy mysteries he is entirely profane. A priest may be a scandalmonger who with poisonous tongue and contrived scurrilities attacks the reputation of a man who has done nothing to deserve it and has in fact done him a service: why do we not greet this with cries of 'Outrage! How dare you with that hellish poison on your tongue,[51] with that mouth with which you butcher an innocent man, both consecrate and eat the body of him who died for the ungodly too?' But this is an evil of which we think so little that men who profess religion in its purest form almost get credit for it. Those men who set a shocking example to the public by openly keeping loose women in their homes ought to be rebuked. Of course: but this other sin is not a little more hateful in the eyes of Christ. One does not condemn butter if one would rather eat honey; one does not approve of fever if one opines that frenzy is more to be avoided. Nor is it easy to express what a decay in moral standards stems from topsy-turvy judgments like this.

Again, there are things enrolled among the virtues which wear even so the mask of piety without its genuine force; so much so that, unless you look where you are going, they extinguish true piety altogether. If only a moderate danger to religion lurked in ceremonies, Paul would not vent his indignation upon them so vigorously in all his Epistles. And yet nowhere do I condemn a moderate degree of ceremony; but I cannot endure that holiness from stem to stern,[52] as they say, should be thought to lie in them. St Augustine even forbade the clerks who were members of his household to wear any peculiar garb; if they wished to win public respect, he said, they should win it by character and not costume.[53] But nowadays what strange prodigious dress we see! Not that I am against this; but I am greatly surprised that too much importance should be given to things which might perhaps rightly be criticized and so little to the only things that really are worth notice. I have no wish to upbraid the Franciscans for being devoted to their own rule and the Benedictines for devotion to theirs; I object that some of them think their rule more important than the gospel. I only hope that this objection does not apply to the majority. I do not attack them because some live on fish, some on vegetables and salads, and some on eggs; but I do point out that those men make a grievous mistake who, in a Jewish spirit,[54] flatter themselves in things like this that they are just, and take such trifles invented by mere men to be a reason to look down on others, while those same men count it no fault at all to make lying attacks on another man's fair fame. On discrimination in food Christ nowhere lays down any rule, nor do the apostles; Paul often speaks against it. Virulent evil-speaking is execrated by Christ and abhorred in the writings of the apostles. And yet on questions of food we wish to give an impression of petty piety; in evil-speaking we are bold and fearless. If a man calls attention to this, in loving language and in general terms, must he, I ask you, be thought to harm the cause of religion? Is anyone mad enough to seek a reputation for eloquence by bringing the faults of monks out into the day? But these men are afraid that their subordinates will be less docile, and also that fewer people will wish to be admitted to their society. In fact, no one is more obedient, more πειθαρχεῖ, to use Paul's expression,[55] than the man who has drunk deep of the spirit of Christ and now begins to be free. True charity takes all things in good part, endures all things, refuses nothing, obeys those who are set over it, not only if they are kind and accommodating but even if they are difficult and harsh.

None the less this is a point that those set in authority must watch all the time: they must not convert the obedience of others into tyranny for themselves, and therefore prefer to have them superstitious rather than godly, that they may observe their masters' lightest whim. They love to hear themselves called fathers; and yet what father is there in real life who wishes that his children may remain infants always, that he may rule them more easily at his own sweet will? On the other hand, those who make progress towards liberty in Christ must be on their guard particularly not to use their liberty as a cloak for the flesh, as Paul points out,[56] and not, as Peter teaches, to make their liberty a covering for wickedness.[57] And if two or three of them have misused this liberty, it is not right for this reason to keep them all without more ado in perpetual Judaism. This will be understood by anyone who has observed that none of them tie the knot of ceremonies tighter than those who use this as a pretext for their rule and live for their own stomachs, not for Christ.[58]

So they need not fear that the sect of Essenes[59] may not spread, in all this great variety of men and minds, which means that nothing is too absurd to seem attractive to many. Not but what these men will find it more desirable that recruits to the religious life should be honourable and geniune rather than numerous. And would that it had been provided by law that no one under the age of thirty[60] should put his head into that kind of noose, before he has learnt to know himself and has discovered the force of true religion! In any case those who take the Pharisees as the model in their business, and course over land and sea that they may make one proselyte, will never be short of inexperienced young men whom they can get into their net and try to persuade.[61] Everywhere the number of fools and simple people is enormous. I at least would hope, and so I doubt not do all truly religious men, that the religion of the gospel might be so deeply loved by all that they would be content with this, and no one go off in search of a Benedictine or Franciscan rule; and Benedict himself and Francis would, I am sure, hope the same thing. Moses rejoices to find himself obscured by the glory of Christ; and they would rejoice likewise, if our love for the law of the gospel made us despise all human codes. How I wish all Christians lived in such a way that those who are now called religious might seem hardly religious at all! Even today this is true in not a few cases; for why need I conceal what is well known? And yet in ancient days the first origin of the monastic life was a retreat from the cruelty of those who worshipped idols. The codes of the monks who soon followed them were nothing but a summons back to Christ. The courts of princes were in old days more Christian in name than in their manner of life. Bishops were soon attacked by the diseases of ambition and greed. The primitive fervour of the common people cooled.[62] Hence the retreat aimed at by Benedict and Bernard after him, and then by many more. It was the banding together of a few men aimed at nothing but a pure and simple Christianity.

If anyone[63] were to study with attention the life and rules of Benedict or Francis or Augustine, he will find that they had no other ambition than to live with friends who joined them willingly a life according to the teaching of the gospel in liberty of spirit; and that they were compelled to lay down some rules for dress and food and other external things, for they were afraid that, as often happens, more importance might be ascribed to the constitutions of human origin that to the gospel. They had a horror of riches; they avoided honours, even in the church. They laboured with their hands, in order not only to be a burden to no man, but to have to give to others in need; they occupied mountain-tops, they made their nests in marshy places, they lived in sandy wastes and deserts. And then they ruled this great concourse of men without violent language and whipping and prisons, but solely by teaching and exhorting, by mutual service and by examples of godly life. Such were the monks so loved and praised by Basil and defended by Chrysostom;[64] to them was appropriate, in any case, what St Jerome writes to Marcella – that choirs of monks and virgins are a blossom and most precious stone among the adornments of the church.[65] On this tribute monks of all kinds pride themselve astonishingly today; they shall be welcome to claim the praise if at the same time they follow the example. For thereafter that wisest of men subjoins a pattern for those monks whom he thought worthy of the name. 'Their language differs,' he says, 'but their religion is one. There are almost as many ways of chanting the psalter as there are different nationalities. In spite of this – what is perhaps the first virtue among Christians – they make no proud claims for their own ascetic life. There is a contest of humility between them all. Whoever was last is thought by them to be first. In clothing there is no distinction, no attempt to impress. The way they may choose to walk is no subject for criticism or for praise. Fasting wins no one promotion; refusal to eat earns no particular respect; moderate eating carries no stigma. Everyone stands or falls by the judgment of his Lord. No man judges another, that he may not be judged by the Lord; and what is common in so many places, the use of their teeth to gnaw at one another, simply does not exist.' Such is the picture of an ideal monk which he set forth; let him that pleases compare it with the customs of the present day.

Such were the first beginning of monasticism, and such its patriarchs. Then gradually, with the passage of time, wealth grew, and with wealth ceremonies; and the genuine piety and simplicity grew cool. And though we see monasteries everywhere whose ways have sunk lower than the laity, even so the world is burdened with fresh foundations, as though they likewise were not likely to fall in the same way. Once, as I said, the monastic life was a refuge from the world. Now men are called monks who spend all their time in the very heart of worldly business and exercise a kind of despotism in human affairs. And yet because of their dress, or because of some name they bear, they claim so much sanctity for themselves that compared with them they think other people hardly Christians. Why do we so closely confine the professed service of Christ, which he wished to be as wide open as possible? If we are moved by splendid names, what else, I ask you, is a city than a great monastery? Monks obey their abbot or those who are set over them; citizens are obedient to their bishop and their pastors, whom Christ himself, not human authority, set over them. Monks live in leisure and are fed by the liberality of other people, possessing in common what has come to them without effort on their part (of wicked monks I say nothing for the present); citizens, each according to his means, share what they have won by their own industry with those in need. Then as concerns the vow of chastity, I would not dare to unfold how little difference there is between celibacy of the ordinary kind and chastity in wedlock. Last but not least, we shall not greatly feel the lack of those three vows,[66] which are man's invention, in someone who has kept in sincerity and purity that one great vow which we took in our baptism, not to man but to Christ. Then if you compare the wicked men in both classes, there is no question that laymen are preferable. Compare the good, and there is very little difference, if there is any at all, except perhaps that they who live a religious life under less compulsion seem more truly religious. The result is therefore that no one should be foolishly self-satisfied because his way of life is not that of other people, nor should he despise or condemn the way of life of others. But in every walk of life let this be the common aim of us all, that to the best of our power we should struggle towards the goal that is set before us all, even Christ, exhorting and even helping one another, with no envy of those who are ahead of us in the race and no scorn for the weak who cannot yet keep up with us. And then, when every man has done his best, he must not become like the Pharisee in the gospel, who boasts of his good deeds before God: 'I fast twice on the sabbath day,' and so on,[67] but follow Christ's advice and say sincerely, say to himself and not to others only, 'I am an unprofitable servant; all I have done was what I had to do.'[68] No one shows more true confidence than he who shows this kind of diffidence. No one is further from true religion than the man who thinks himself truly religious. And never does true Christian piety come off worse than when what belongs to the world is misrepresented as Christ's and man's authority is set above God's. We have one head, and in him we must all agree if we wish to be truly Christians. Moreover, he who obeys a man who summons him to follow Christ obeys Christ and not man. And he who endures men who are all sham – cruel domineering men who teach not what makes for religion but what bolsters their own tyranny – displays the patience of a Christian only as long as the commands they issue make him only unhappy and not ungodly too. Otherwise, he will do better to meet them with the apostle's answer on his lips: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'[69]

But I long ago passed the bounds of a letter, so little count does one take of time when gossiping most agreeably with a very dear friend. The book, virtually reborn in Froben's types,[70] is much more elegant and correct than it was before and wings its way now to your arms. I have added some fragments from early works of mine.[71] And I decided to attach this new edition to you, such as it is, rather than anyone else, that he who draws principles of holy living from Erasmus may find an example, in the shape of Volz, immediately at hand. Farewell, most worthy Father and peculiar glory of the true religious life.

Tell Sapidus[72] from me to keep his true wits about him, which means, to be always his true self. Tell Wimpfeling[73] to get his shining armour ready, to do battle shortly with the Turks, now that he has waged war long enough with priests who live in sin.[74] I hope that one day we shall see him a bishop, glorious in mitre with two horns and crozier, riding high on his mule. Seriously though, I do ask you to give them and Ruser[75] and my other friends my very warmest greetings. And remember sometimes to commend the salvation of your friend Erasmus in pure vows and pious prayers to Christ the almighty God.

Basel, eve of the Assumption, 1518

THE HANDBOOK OF THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM TO A FRIEND AT COURT[1]

You have urgently entreated me, most beloved brother in the Lord, to set down for you a kind of summary guide to living, so that, equipped with it, you might attain to a state of mind worthy of Christ. For you say that you have for some time past grown weary of a courtier's life, and are wondering how you may escape from Egypt, with her sins and allurements, and successfully gird yourself to follow Moses on the road to virtue. Holding you especially dear, as I do, I rejoice more heartily in this your most worthy purpose; I hope that, apart from any help of mine, he who vouchsafed to awaken it within you will prosper and advance it. Yet I very willingly obey a good friend who makes a request so Christian as this. Only you must try not to appear to have insisted on my help without good cause or make me seem to have acceded to your request unprofitably; let us, on the contrary, unite our prayers and beseech our Lord's gracious Spirit to give me good counsel as I write, and to render my words profitable for you.

One must be vigilant in life

First of all you ought to bear constantly in mind that the life of mortals is nothing else but an unremitting warfare, according to the testimony of Job,[1] a tried and unvanquished soldier, and that the generality of mankind is greatly deceived, their minds held captive by the flattering illusions and prestidigitations of this world. They take unseasonable holidays, as if the battle were over, and live in the utmost peace and security, and lose not a wink of sleep,[2] although we are ceaselessly under attack by the armour-clad forces of vice, ensnared by so many wiles, beleaguered by so many treacheries. In sleepless vigils wicked demons keep watch over your head, bent on your destruction, armed with a thousand stratagems and a thousand devices for inflicting harm upon us. They contrive to transfix our minds from on high with flaming weapons dipped in deadly poison, surer than the shafts of Hercules[3] or Cephalus,[4] unless they be fended off by the impenetrable shield of faith.[5]

Furthermore, on the right and on the left, from front and rear, we are attacked by this world, which according to the words of St John is given over entirely to vice,[6] and for that reason is the hated and deadly enemy of Christ. Nor does the world have but one method of attack. At times, through adversity, it batters the walls of the spirit with a heavy battering ram, raging as in open combat; at times it incites us to betrayal with huge but empty promises; at times by devious subterfuges it creeps up on us to catch us unaware in our false security. Lastly, from the regions of hell that slimy serpent, the first to betray our peace, now camouflaged by the green grass,[7] now lurking in his subterranean caverns, twisted into a hundred coils, never ceases to lie in wait for the heel of the woman,[8] whom he once corrupted. By woman I mean the carnal part of man. This is our Eve,[9] through whom the cunning serpent lures our mind towards deadly pleasures.

Moreover, as if it were not enough to be threatened on all sides by enemy forces, we bear within us in the innermost part of our being an enemy more familiar to us than the members of our own household or our closest friends,[10] and for that reason all the more dangerous. Yes, it is that old, earthly Adam,[11] by virtue of his intimacy with us more than our fellow citizen, but by ambition and design more than our enemy, one whom we cannot ward off with ramparts or drive out of our camp. He must be watched with a hundred eyes[12] lest he lay open the fortress of God to the demons of hell.

Therefore, although we are all engaged in such a difficult and dire conflict, and must do battle with an enemy so numerous, so sworn and vowed to our destruction, so vigilant, so heavily armed, so treacherous, and so well trained, yet, poor fools that we are, shall we not take up arms against them? Not mount guard? Not hold all things suspect? On the contrary, we lie flat on our backs, snoring the day away, as if everything were at peace. We remain idle, give ourselves up to pleasure, and take care of our own skins[13] without a care in the world. As if our life were not warfare, but a Greek symposium, we roll around in our beds rather than in animal skins upon the bare earth; we are garlanded with roses and the delights of Adonis[14] rather than girded in harsh armour; instead of devoting ourselves to military pursuits we are sunk in idle luxury; in place of the weapons of war we handle the unwarlike cithara, as if this kind of peace were not the most hideous of all wars. For whoever makes peace with vice violates the treaty struck with God at baptism. And you, you raving fool, cry out: 'Peace, peace,'[15] while you make yourself an enemy of God, who alone is peace and the author of peace. He cries back in a clear voice through the mouth of the prophet: 'There is no peace for the wicked.'[16] Nor are there any other terms of peace with him except that as long as we are soldiers in this garrison of the body we make war upon vice with implacable hatred and with all our strength. Otherwise, if we make terms with vice, we will make a twofold enemy of him who alone as friend can render us happy or as enemy consign us to eternal perdition. We will be taking sides with things with which God will never be reconciled (how can there be any accord between light and darkness?),[17] and with sheer ingratitude we do not keep faith with what we solemnly promised to him, criminally violating a covenant ratified by sacred ceremonies.

Are you not aware, O Christian soldier,[18] that when you were initiated into the mysteries of the life-giving font,[19] you enrolled in the army of Christ, your general, to whom you twice owed your life, since he both gave it and restored it to you, and to whom you owed more than to your very self. Does it not occur to you that in a solemn utterance you pledged your loyalty to such a benign commander and engaged yourself in his service by his sacraments,[20] as in a votive offering, vowing your life to him under threat of terrible condemnation if you were not to keep your word? To what purpose was the sign of the cross stamped upon your brow save that, as long as you lived, you would serve under his banner? To what purpose was it that you were annointed with his sacred oil, save that you were to enter into an unending struggle with vice? What shame, what a universal execration, as it were, is brought upon the whole human race when a man deserts his prince and commander! Why do you hold Christ, your general, in derision, not inhibited by fear although he is God, nor by love although he became man for your sake? By the very name you bear you should be reminded of what promises you made to him. Why do you treacherously defect to the enemy from whom he once ransomed you at the price of his blood?[21] Why do you serve in the enemy camp, twice a deserter? Do you have the audacity to raise up enemy standards against your king, who expended his life for you? For, as he himself said, he who is not with him is against him, and he who does not gather with him, scatters.[22]

You not only serve under an ignominious banner, but for ill-fated wages. Do you wish to hear what your wages are, those of you who serve in the ranks of the world? Listen to the words of Paul, standard-bearer of the Christian forces: 'The wages of sin is death.'[23] Who would sign up even for a glorious military campaign if the death of the body was offered to him in return? Yet you undergo such an abominable warfare with the death of the soul as your promised reward? In these insane wars that men wage against each other through brutish savagery or harsh necessity do you not see that once the spirit of the soldiers has been spurred on by the promise of abundant booty or the terror of the enemy's cruelty in victory or the reproach incurred by cowardice or by the desire for praise, they accomplish with cheerful alacrity whatever labours have been imposed upon them? How cheap they esteem life and how they vie with one another to rush upon the enemy! And yet, I ask you, how paltry is the reward these miserable creatures aspire after at such risk and with such fervour? to be congratulated by some insignificant officer and feted with some crude ditty amidst the uproar of the camp, or to be crowned with a garland of grass or oak leaves and take home a little more pay.

We, on the contrary, are inspired neither by shame nor by reward, since the witness of our struggle will also be our rewarder.[24] What prizes has our director of the games[25] set before us? Surely not tripods or mules as Achilles offered in Homer,[26] or Aeneas in Virgil,[27] but 'that which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived,'[28] and he often imparts these rewards to those still engaged in the combat as a solace for their labours. And then what? A blessed immortality. But in those public contests in which glory is the greatest part of the reward, even those who lose are awarded prizes by lot. With us the contest is conducted at great peril and with dubious issue; we are not contending for praise, but for our lives. And as the greatest reward is offered to the one who performs most diligently,[29] so the greatest penalty is reserved for the deserter. Since heaven is promised to him who fights valiantly,[30] would not the lively courage of a noble spirit glow with ardour at the prospect of such an auspicious reward? Especially since the author of this promise is one who could no more deceive than he could cease to exist. Everything takes place before the all-seeing eyes of God. With the whole heavenly throng as witnesses of our struggle, are we not at least moved by a sense of shame? Our courage will receive the praise of him whose praise is counted as the highest felicity. Should we not seek this praise even at the cost of our lives? Only the faint-hearted cannot be stirred by the promise of reward, but even the most cowardly are roused through fear of harm that may befall them. But here on earth the enemy, however implacable, vents his rage only against the body and earthly fortunes. What further violence could the cruel victor Achilles inflict upon Hector? But in that other struggle the violence is directed against the immortal part of your being. Your corpse may not be dragged around a funeral pyre,[31] but soul and body together will be plunged into hell. In war the greatest disaster is that the sword of the victor may separate the soul from the body, but in this struggle the very life of the soul, God, is taken away. It is natural that the body perish, for even if no one kills it, it must necessarily die. But for the soul to die is the supreme disaster. With what caution we ward off injury from the body, and with what solicitude we treat it – but shall we neglect injuries done to the soul? We stand aghast at the spectacle of the death of the body, because we see it with bodily eyes. But since no one sees the death of the soul, few believe in it and very few dread it. Yet that death is much more terrible, in the same degree as the soul is superior to the body and God to the soul.

Do you wish me to provide you with some symptoms by which you may recognize the sickness or death of the soul? When you have poor digestion and cannot retain food, you recognize this as a bodily ailment. Bread is less the food of the body than the word of God is the food of the soul.[32] If this food becomes unpalatable to you, if it nauseates you, how can you still doubt that the palate of your soul is infected with disease? If it does not assimilate this food, if it does not digest it and transmit it to the bowels, then you have sure proof that the soul is sick. When your knees totter and you can barely drag your tired limbs about, you know the body is not well. Can you not deduce that the soul is sick if it performs all its acts of piety with languor and distaste, when it cannot bear with the slightest repulse, or becomes dejected at the loss of a little money? When sight has left the eyes and the ears have ceased to hear and the whole body has sunk into torpidity, no one doubts that the soul has departed. When the eyes of the heart are so obscured[33] that you cannot perceive the bright light of truth, when you cannot hear the divine voice with the ears of the soul, when you are bereft of all feeling, do you think that the soul is alive? You see your brother treated unjustly, but your feelings are not disturbed as long as your own fortunes are not endangered. Why is the soul insensitive in these circumstances? Obviously because it is dead. Why is it dead? Because its life is not present, which is God. For where God is, there is love.[34] 'God is love.'[35]

Otherwise, if you are a living member, why is it that when any part of the body is in pain,[36] you feel no pain and are not even aware of it? Let me give you another even clearer example: you cheated a friend and you committed adultery; the soul has received a mortal blow, and yet you are so far from feeling any remorse that you are actually glad that you made some money and you boast about your shameful conduct. You may be certain that your soul lies dead. The body is not alive if it does not feel the prick of a tiny pin; can the soul be alive when it has no feeling of such a grievous wound? If you hear someone uttering profane, uninhibited, abusive, immoral, and obscene words, raging against his neighbor in uncontrolled language, do not imagine that this man's soul is alive. A stinking corpse lies in the sepulchre of his heart and the foul smells given off from it infect all those who come near it. Christ called the Pharisees whitened sepulchres.[37] Why? Because they carried a dead soul around with them. And the royal prophet said: 'Their throat is a wide-open grave; they used their tongues deceit-fully.'[38] The bodies of the pious are the temples of the Holy Spirit;[39] those of the impious are the tombs of corpses, so that the etymology given by grammarians relating σῶμα 'body'[40] and σῆμα 'tomb' is particularly applicable to them. The breast of an impious man is a tomb; his throat and his mouth the opening of the tomb. No body deprived of the soul is as dead as the soul abandoned by God. And no corpse is so offensive to men's nostrils as the stench of the buried soul after three days is to the nostrils of God and all the heavenly spirits. Therefore when dead words proceed from the heart, a corpse must lie within. For if according to the saying of the gospel, 'out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks,'[41] then it would speak the living words of God, if life, that is, God, were present there. By contrast, the disciples say to Christ in the gospel: 'Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of life.'[42] Why do they say 'words of life'? Surely because they flowed from a soul from which divinity never departed even for an instant, and which restored us also to eternal life.

When the body is sick the doctor brings some relief, and often holy men have called a lifeless body back to life. But God alone revives the dead soul by an extraordinary and gratuitous power, but even he does not revive it if it was already dead when it left the body. Moreover, the sensation of bodily death is either non-existent or at the most very short-lived, while that of the soul's death is eternal. Even if in other respects it is more than dead, nevertheless with regard to the sensation of death it is in a certain sense immortal. So then, if we must do battle with such a new peril, what state of lethargy, what complacency, what inertness of mind would not be stirred by fear of so great an evil?

On the other hand, there is no reason for you to be dismayed, no matter what the magnitude of the danger or the numbers, strength, and ruses of the enemy. You are conscious of the enemy's powers;[43] be conscious also of the presence of your divine helper. Your foes are innumerable, but he who is on your side is more powerful than all of them. 'If God is for us, who is against us?'[44] If he upholds us, who will overthrow us? You must only conceive the desire for victory with all your heart. Bear in mind that you are not pitted against an enemy who has suffered no defeats, but with one who has already been crushed, routed, despoiled, and even led away in triumph by us in the person of Christ our Head, by whom without a doubt he will be defeated also in us.[45] Merely take care that you remain in the body and you will be capable of all things in the Head. By yourself you are too weak; in him there is nothing you cannot do.[46] Accordingly, the outcome of our struggle is not in doubt, because victory does not depend at all on chance but is entirely in the hands of God and through him also in our hands. No one fails to win in this battle except those who do not want to win. The goodness of our helper has never failed anyone. If you see to it that you do not forsake his goodness, you can be sure of victory. He will fight for you, and he will impute his own liberality to your merit.[47] You must ascribe all the victory to him, who was the first and only one, himself free of sin,[48] to suppress the tyranny of sin, but this victory will not come about without your effort. For he who said: 'Have confidence, for I have overcome the world'[49] wishes you to be of great courage but not overconfident. We will win through him in the end, if we fight as he fought. Thus you must steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis[50] so that you will neither become too confident and careless, relying on divine grace, nor be so discouraged by the hardships of the war that you lay down your spirit together with your arms.

The armour of the Christian militia

The matter of first concern in training for this military service is, I think, that you give careful thought and consideration to the weapons that are to be employed and to the nature of the enemy with whom you must join battle. Next, that you have them always in readiness lest that cunning ambusher set upon you when you are unarmed and unaware. In ordinary wars there is usually a period of respite when the enemy is in winter quarters or when a truce is interposed. But for us, as long as we are at war in this body, we cannot be even an inch[1] away from our weapons. We must never leave our positions in the front lines of the encampment, never cease to stand guard, because our enemy is never idle. On the contrary, when he appears peaceful, or when he feigns flight or a temporary truce, it is then that he is preparing a sneak attack. There is no time when we should be more on our guard then when he gives the appearance of peace, and no time when we should have less fear than when he launches an open attack. Therefore let it be your first care that the mind is not disarmed. We arm this miserable body so that we may not fear the thief's dagger; shall we not arm the mind for its protection? The enemy is armed to destroy us; do we hesitate to take up arms for our survival? They keep watch so that they may annihilate us; shall we not keep watch to preserve our own safety?

But we shall speak in detail about Christian armament in the proper place. In the mean time, to sum it up in a few words, we must prepare two weapons in particular against the seven tribes with whom we must do battle,[2] the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, that is to say, against the whole horde of vices, principally the seven deadly sins.[3] These two weapons are prayer and knowledge. Paul wishes us to be always armed, bidding us to pray without ceasing.[4] Devout prayer raises our desires to heaven, a stronghold inaccessible to the enemy, and knowledge in turn fortifies the intellect with salutary opinions so that the one will not be lacking to the other. 'Each asks the other's aid / and makes with it a friendly pact.'[5] One makes prayerful entreaty; the other suggests what should be prayed for. Faith and hope ensure that you pray ardently and, as St James says, 'free of doubt.'[6] Knowledge teaches you to pray in the name of Jesus, that is, to ask for things that will lead to your salvation. The sons of Zebedee heard this said to them by Christ: 'You know not what you ask.'[7] Prayer is the more effective of the two, since it is a conversation with God, but knowledge is no less necessary. In your flight from Egypt I am not certain whether you can undertake such a long and difficult journey without these two guides, Moses and Aaron. Aaron, who was in charge of sacred ceremonies, is the symbol of prayer, and Moses stands for knowledge of the law.

Just as knowledge must not be deficient, so prayer must not be faint-hearted. Moses fights the enemy with the weapons of prayer, but with his hands raised up to heaven.[8] As soon as he let them down, Israel's fortunes sank lower. Perhaps when you pray you merely consider how many psalms you have mumbled and you think that the power of prayer consists in a multitude of words. This is the greatest vice of those who are still infants in their adhering to the letter and who have not grown up into the maturity of the spirit. Listen to what Christ teaches us in St Matthew: 'When you pray, do not use many words as the pagans do: they think that their prayers will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you have need of before you ask him.'[9] And Paul is contemptuous of ten thousand words pronounced in ecstasy, that is, with the lips,[10] preferring five words uttered with understanding. Moses did not utter a sound, and yet he heard: 'Why do you call out to me?'[11] It is not a loud noise coming from the lips but the ardent desire of the mind that like some piercing sound strikes the ears of God. Make it your practice that whenever the enemy assails you or vices that you have abandoned come back to torment you, you lift your mind immediately to heaven with sure confidence, whence help will come to you,[12] but raise your hands up to heaven also. The safest recourse is to be occupied with works of piety, so that your actions will not be directed towards earthly ambitions, but to Christ.

So that you will not underestimate the advantages of knowledge, consider this. At first Israel was content to escape the enemy, and did not have enough confidence in itself to challenge the Amalekite[13] to hand-to-hand combat until it had been restored by heavenly manna[14] and water that gushed forth from the rock.[15] Strengthened by such nourishment, the mighty warrior David regarded the whole enemy host with contempt, saying: 'You have prepared before my eyes a table in the face of all those who persecute us.'[16] Believe me, dearest brother, there is no onslaught of the enemy so violent, that is, no temptation so strong that the fervent study of the sacred Scriptures will not easily repel it; no adversity so painful that it will not render it tolerable.

And yet, without wishing to appear too bold in my interpretation (although I could produce great authorities to defend my view), what more apt figure than manna could be devised to express the knowledge of the mysteries of the law? To begin with, since it did not issue from the earth but rained down from heaven, you can observe the distinction between human and divine learning. All sacred Scripture is divinely inspired and has proceeded from God, its author.[17] That it was in tiny particles signifies the lowliness of speech that conceals immense mysteries in almost crude language; that it was white signifies that there is no human learning that is not defiled by some blackness of error, while only the doctrine of Christ is as white as snow, immaculate, and unadulterated. That it was somewhat rough and granular[18] signifies that the mystery is concealed by the letter. If one touches only the surface or the husk, so to speak, of Scripture, what is harder or more unpleasant to the touch? Was it not merely the hard covering of the manna that they touched who exclaimed: 'This saying is harsh, and who can listen to it?'[19] Search out the spiritual meaning, and you will find nothing more sweet or succulent. Finally, 'manna' in Hebrew means 'What is this?'[20] which fits divine Scripture perfectly, since it contains nothing superfluous, not the smallest point that is not worthy of study and wonder and not worthy of the question 'What is this?'

It is common for the Holy Spirit to use the symbol of water to signify knowledge of the divine law: the refreshing waters of the law on which David boasts that he was nurtured,[21] the water of the law that wisdom diverts to the sources of all ways;[22] the mystical river of the law that Ezekiel could not wade across after entering into it;[23] the wells of the law that Abraham dug, and that Isaac dug again after they had been filled with dirt by the Philistines;[24] the twelve springs of the law where the weary Israelites recovered their strength after forty days of wandering.[25] In the gospel too there is the well of the law upon which Jesus sat when he was weary from the journey;[26] the waters of Siloe,[27] to which he sent the blind man to recover his sight; the water of the law poured into a basin for washing the feet of the apostles;[28] and, not to recall every single instance, there is frequent mention in the sacred writings of wells, springs, and rivers with this meaning, by which we are to understand that the diligent inquiry into the mystical writings is commended to us. What is the meaning of water hidden in the veins of the earth but that the mystery is veiled by the letter? What is the meaning of water gushing forth in cascades but that the mystery is unveiled and explained? And when this mystery is spread abroad far and wide for the edification of the listener, what is to prevent us from calling it a river?

Therefore, if you dedicate yourself entirely to the study of the Scriptures, if you meditate day and night on the law of the Lord,[29] you will have no fear, day or night, but you will be protected and trained against any attack of the enemy. For my part, I should certainly not disapprove a kind of preliminary training[30] in the writings of the pagan poets and philosophers in preparation for this military service, provided that one engages in these studies with moderation and at the right age and only in passing, but does not linger over them and waste away as at the Sirens' rocks.[31] In fact St Basil invites the young boys whom he trained in Christian morals to the pursuit of these studies,[32] and Augustine recalls his friend Licentius to the Muses.[33] Jerome, too, does not feel regret concerning his beloved female captive.[34] Cyprian is praised because he enriched the temple of the Lord with Egyptian spoils;[35] but I would not want you to imbibe pagan morals together with pagan writings.

On the other hand, you will find many things there which are conducive to a holy life, and the good precepts of a pagan author should not be rejected, since not even Moses spurned the advice of his father-in-law Jethro.[36] These writings shape and invigorate the child's mind and provide an admirable preparation for the understanding of the divine Scriptures, for it is almost an act of sacrilege to rush into these studies without due preparation.[37] Jerome reproaches the impudence of those who dare to expatiate on the sacred Scriptures after just completing their secular studies,[38] but how much more impudent are those who attempt the same thing without even having had a taste of the preparatory study. But just as the divine Scriptures themselves do not bear much fruit if you persist in adhering to the letter, so the poetry of Homer and Virgil is of no little profit if you remember that it is entirely allegorical. And no one who has had even the slightest acquaintance with ancient learning will deny this.

As for the obscene poets, I should advise you not to read them at all or certainly not delve into them deeply unless you are convinced that you will abhor vice the more by reading descriptions of it and that you will acquire a more ardent love of virtue by contrasting it with wickedness. Of the philosophers I should recommend the Platonists because in much of their thinking as well as in their mode of expression they are the closest to the spirit of the prophets and of the gospel.[39] In brief, it would be profitable to have a taste of all pagan literature, if, as I said, it is done at the appropriate time and with moderation, with caution and discrimination, as well as in a cursory manner, more in the manner of a foreign visitor than a resident, and lastly and most important, if it all be related to Christ. For in that way all things are pure to the pure,[40] while to the impure nothing is pure.

No one will impute it to you as a crime if after the example of Solomon you maintain sixty queens and eighty concubines under your roof,[41] and countless young girls endowed with secular wisdom, provided that divine wisdom above all the others is your one and only, your fairest, your dove. Even an Israelite can love a foreign, barbarian woman,[42] taken by her beauty, but by shaving off her hair and cutting her fingernails he makes an Israelite of a foreign-born woman. Hosea also married a harlot,[43] but he raised children born of her not for himself, but for the Lord of Sabaoth, and the holy fornication of the prophet increased the family of the Lord. After the Hebrews left Egypt, they lived for a time on unleavened bread,[44] but this was temporary nourishment and could not suffice for their long journey. Therefore when you have quickly become tired of that food, you must hasten with all speed to the manna of heavenly wisdom,[45] which will nourish you to complete satisfaction and will revive you until you achieve your goal and attain to the palm of victory, a reward that will never fail.

But in the mean time remember that you must approach the sacred Scriptures with washed hands, that is with the greatest purity of mind, so that the antidote to your ills does not turn into poison and the manna become rotten if it does not pass immediately into the bowels of the emotions. Else you will suffer the same fate as Uzzah,[46] who was not afraid to lay his profane hands on the tottering arch and expiated his improper action by his sudden death. In the first place, you must have an opinion of these writings that is worthy of them. Think of them as nothing less than oracles (which indeed they are), that have issued from the holy of holies of the divine mind. You will feel that you are inspired, moved, swept away, transfigured in an ineffable manner by the divine power if you approach them with respect, veneration, and humility. You will behold the delights of the divine bridegroom; you will behold the opulence of rich King Solomon; you will behold the hidden treasures of eternal wisdom. But be careful that you do not rashly break into the secret room. The doorway is low;[47] make sure that you do not strike your head and be thrown backwards. Be convinced that of all the things you see with your eyes and touch with your hands nothing is so true as what you read therein. Though heaven and earth perish, it is certain that not one iota or one tittle of the divine words will perish until all be fulfilled.[48] Though men lie and are deceived, the truth of God neither deceives nor is deceived.

Of the interpreters of divine Scripture choose those especially who depart as much as possible from the literal sense, such as, after Paul, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. I notice that modern theologians are too willing to stick to the letter and give their attention to sophistic subtleties rather than to the elucidation of the mysteries, as if Paul were not right in saying that our law is spiritual.[49] I have heard tell of some individuals who were so pleased with these petty human commentaries that they despised the interpretations of the ancient Fathers as if they were dreams, and such was their confidence in Scotus[50] that without ever having read the Scriptures they thought they were accomplished theologians. Even if they speak with great subtlety, let others judge whether what they have said is worthy of the Holy Spirit. If you prefer to be strong spiritually rather than clever in debate, if you seek sustenance for the soul rather than mere titillation of the intellect, read and reread the ancient commentators in preference to all others, since their piety is more proven, their learning more profuse and more experienced, their style neither jejune nor impoverished, and their interpretation more fitted to the sacred mysteries. I do not say this because I look down upon the moderns, but because I prefer writings that are more useful and more conducive to your purpose.

The divine Spirit has his own peculiar language and modes of speech, which you must learn through careful observation. Divine wisdom speaks to us in baby-talk and like a loving mother accommodates its words to our state of infancy. It offers milk to tiny infants in Christ,[51] and herbs to the sick. But you must hasten to grow so that you may receive solid food. It lowers itself to your lowliness, but you on your part must rise to its sublimity. It is unnatural to remain always an infant, and it is the height of indolence to be continually infirm. Meditation on a single verse will have more savour and nourishment, if you break through the husk and extract the kernel, than the whole Psalter chanted monotonously with regard only for the letter. I caution you about this with all the more concern because I know from experience that this error has taken hold not only of the minds of the common people but also of those who in name and in habit profess perfect religion. Such is their aberration that they think it is the culmination of piety to recite the greatest number of psalms possible each day, even though they barely understand the literal sense. I think the principal reason why we see that monastic piety is everywhere so cold, languid, and almost extinct is that they are growing old in the letter and never take pains to learn the spiritual sense of the Scriptures. They do not hear Christ crying out in the gospel: 'The flesh is of no profit; it is the spirit that gives life,'[52] nor do they hear Paul, who adds to the words of the master: 'The letter kills, it is the spirit that gives life,'[53] and: 'We know that the law is spiritual, not carnal,'[54] and again: 'Spiritual things must be acquired through spiritual things.'[55] Formerly the Father of spirits was worshipped on the mountain, now he wishes to be worshipped in spirit.[56]

And yet I do not mean to despise in any way the weakness of those who for lack of mental capacity do the only thing they can do, which is to recite the mystical psalms with a simple and pure faith.[57] As in magical formulas certain words which are not even understood by those who pronounce them are still thought to be efficacious, so divine words, though little understood, should be believed to be beneficial to those by whom they are pronounced or listened to with sincere faith and pure affection. We may be certain also that the angels, who are present and understand, are thus summoned to bring help. Nor indeed does Paul condemn those who sing in spirit or speak with tongues,[58] but he exhorts them to seek better gifts. But if some cannot attain to this, through defect not of spirit but of nature, that does not prevent others from striving after better things. As St Paul says: 'Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat despise him who eats.'[59] But as for you, who are endowed with such good mental abilities, I should wish you not to linger over the sterile literal sense, but to hasten on to more profound mysteries, assisting the inadequate efforts of human industry with frequent prayer until he who has the key of David,[60] which closes and no man opens, will open to you the book sealed with the seven seals,[61] and will reveal the secrets of 'the Father known only to the Son and to whomever the Son wishes to reveal them.'[62]

But where is my discussion taking me? I had intended to prescribe for you a way of life, not a program of study. But I have digressed from the subject because I was attempting to point out to you a suitable arsenal from which you could draw new weapons for your new warfare. Therefore, to return to my subject, if you cull what is best from the ancient authors, and like the bee flitting about the garden suck out only the wholesome and choice juice, leaving aside the poison, your mind will be much better equipped for the common life that they call moral. For there is no doubt that Pallas Minerva also has her armour, which is not at all to be despised. In any case, no matter where you find truth, attribute it to Christ.[63] But that divine armour, which the poets call Vulcanian,[64] impregnable to every dart, is acquired only from the arsenal of Holy Scripture. Here our military commander David has stored all the armaments of war for his soldiers, with which they will fight the uncircumcised Philistines at long and at close range.[65] With these arms neither Homer's Achilles nor Virgil's Aeneas was protected, despite the fiction of the poets, the one so shamefully vanquished by wrath, the other by love. It is not absurd to say that these arms are not forged in human workshops but in one which Vulcan and Minerva share in common. For the poets, who are the fashioners of the gods, set Minerva over the arts and works of ingenuity and to Vulcan they gave dominion over fire. This only comes about, I think, when a spirit imbued with the finest learning is so fortified by divine love that even 'if heaven's vault should crash and fall, / He steadfast stands and unafraid.'[66]

But first you must cast away the armour of proud Saul,[67] which is more of a hindrance than a help, as David is about to do combat with Goliath. Then you must pick up the five small stones on the bank of the stream of the mystical Scriptures (which perhaps are those five intelligible words that Paul mentions),[68] and finally you must take up the sling in your right hand. Only with these arms will our enemy, Satan, the father of pride, be laid low. How did Christ our leader finally overcome him? When he answered the tempter with the words of divine Scripture,[69] did he not strike him in the forehead, as it were, with stones taken from the torrent? Do you wish to know what the armour of the Christian Pallas is? 'And he will take up the arms of his zeal and he will arm creation to take vengeance on his enemies. He will put on *justice as a breastplate and will wear sure judgment as a helmet. He will take* up justice as an indestructible shield; he will sharpen his terrible anger into a lance.'[70] In Isaiah also you read: 'He put on justice as a breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head. He was clothed with the garments of vengeance and wrapped in the mantle of zeal.'[71]

And if you would like to have access to the storehouse of Paul, a leader not lacking in courage, there you will also find words like these: 'The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, annihilating philosophical reasoning and all haughtiness that flouts the knowledge of God.'[72] You will find there the armour of God,[73] by which you can resist in the evil day; you will find the weapon of justice[74] for the right hand and for the left; you will find defence for your flanks, which is truth, and the breastplate of justice,[75] the shield of faith,[76] with which you will be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the evil one. You will also find the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.[77] If anyone is duly protected and fortified by this armour, he will be able to utter fearlessly those spirited words of St Paul: 'Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or necessity, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or persecution, or the sword?'[78] See how many universally dreaded enemies he counts as nothing? But listen to an even more audacious utterance, as he continues: 'But in all of these things we are victorious because of him who loved us. For I am certain that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor force, nor heights, nor depths, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.'[79] Oh what a happy assurance the armour of light gives to Paul, a feeble mortal, who even calls himself the offscouring of this world![80] The force of such armour, therefore, will be provided you by the sacred Scriptures if with all your heart you dedicate yourself to them in such a way that there will be no further need of my admonishments.

But since it is your wish, and since I should not wish to appear unobliging, I hammered out an 'enchiridion,' that is, a sort of dagger, which you should never put aside, not even at table or in bed, so that if you are ever compelled to sojourn as a stranger among the affairs of this world and would find it too burdensome to carry around your full armour, you will not allow yourself to be overcome at any moment by that ambusher when you are totally unarmed. Do not be reluctant, at least, to keep this poignard with you, which will be neither heavy to carry nor useless for your defence. It is admittedly very small, but if you know how to use it rightly together with the shield of faith, you will easily withstand the violent onslaught of the enemy and will not receive a mortal wound. But now it is time for me to impart some instructions on the use of this weapon. If you will put this teaching to use carefully, I am confident that Christ, our commander, will transport you in triumph from this garrison into his city of Jerusalem,[81] where there is no tumult of war, but everlasting peace and perfect tranquillity. In the mean time, however, all hope of salvation must be placed in this armour.

That the beginning of wisdom is to know oneself, and on true and false wisdom

Peace therefore is the highest good, to which even the lovers of the world bend their efforts, but it is a false peace, as I said above.[1] This same peace was promised by the philosophers to their followers, but falsely, for Christ alone gives that peace which the world cannot give.[2] There is only one way to arrive at that peace, and that is to make war upon ourselves and to do battle with our vices. For God, our peace, is at odds with these enemies with an implacable hatred, because he is virtue itself by his very essence and the father and author of all virtues. The dregs of impurity accumulated from every species of vice is called 'stupidity' by the Stoics,[3] valiant defenders of virtue, but in our holy writings it is called 'malice.' Similarly, the purest virtue, perfect in every respect, is called wisdom in both traditions. Now is it not true that wisdom conquers malice according to the oracle of the sage?[4] The father and prince of malice is the lord of darkness, Belial,[5] and whoever follows his guidance, walking in the night, hastens on the way to eternal night.

In contrast, Jesus Christ is the author of wisdom and indeed wisdom itself,[6] the true light[7] that alone scatters the night of worldly stupidity, the reflection of the glory of the Father,[8] who, as he became redemption and justification to us who were reborn in him according to the testimony of Paul, so he also became wisdom. Paul says: 'We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews, to be sure, and folly to the Gentiles, but to those that have been called, whether Jews or Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.'[9] Through this wisdom, following Christ's example, may we also be able to triumph over the enemy, malice, if only we would be wise in him, in whom we shall also be victorious. Embrace this wisdom, scorning the wisdom of the world, which sells itself under a false title to the foolish, while in reality, as Paul says, there is no greater stupidity than earthly wisdom, which one must unlearn if he truly wishes to be wise. 'If any among you appears wise in this world, let him become a fool in order to be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God.'[10] A little earlier he says: 'For it is written: I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise and I shall bring to naught the learning of the learned. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the clever debater of this age? Has not God made the wisdom of this world foolish?'[11]

I have no doubt that these foolish sages and blind leaders of the blind[12] are tiresomely dinning in your ears that you are out of your mind and raving mad, because you are ready to go over to the side of Christ. They are Christians in name only, but in all other respects they are mockers and opponents of the teaching of Christ. See to it that their blatherings do not influence you, because their pitiful blindness is more to be lamented than imitated. Indeed, what is this absurd kind of wisdom that is shrewd and clever in trivial, worthless, and even debasing things, while in those things which alone pertain to our salvation it is not much wiser than the brute beast. Paul wishes us to be wise, but in what is good,[13] and simple in what is evil. Those men are wise in accomplishing evil deeds,[14] but they do not know how to do good. And if that eloquent Greek poet thought that one who is neither wise himself nor listens to those who give him good advice is good for nothing,[15] in what class shall we put those who are shamelessly stupid themselves, and yet never cease to annoy, ridicule, and discourage those who have returned to their senses? Shall not the mocker be mocked? 'He who dwells in heaven will mock them in turn, and the Lord will laugh them to scorn.'[16] You read in the Book of Wisdom: 'They will see him and despise him, but God will deride them.'[17] To be laughed at by the wicked is almost to be praised. It is certainly a glorious thing to become emulators of our leader and of the apostles, but it is a terrible thing to be laughed at by God. 'I too,' says wisdom, 'shall laugh at your distress and I shall mock you when what you feared comes upon you,'[18] that is, when they have waked up too late and will say: 'Here are those whom we once held in scorn and made the butt of our sarcasm. Fools that we were, we considered their life madness and their end to be without honour.'[19] 'That wisdom,' says James, 'is brutish, diabolical, and inimical to God.'[20] Its end is perdition[21] because pernicious arrogance always follows after it as its attendant; arrogance is then followed by blindness of spirit, blindness by the tyranny of the emotions, and this by a whole harvest of vices and the freedom to commit every manner of sin. This freedom leads to habit, then a fatal dullness of the mind, which produces a complete insensitivity to evil. In this state of torpor the death of the body takes hold of them, followed by the second death.[22] You see how the wisdom of the world is the mother of the greatest evil.

But of the wisdom of Christ, which the world considers foolishness, you read: 'All good things came to me together with her and countless riches through her hands. And I rejoiced in them all because this wisdom preceded me, and I was unaware that she was the mother of all good things.'[23] She has as her attendants modesty and docility. Docility makes us capable of receiving the divine Spirit. For he is pleased to rest[24] in the humble and gentle person, and once he has imbued our minds with his sevenfold gifts,[25] then at last that fruitful crop of all the virtues will sprout up together with the blessed fruits of the Spirit.[26] The chief of these is an interior joy, a secret joy, a joy known only to those who have experienced it, which neither vanishes nor is taken away from us with the pleasures of the world, but is heaped up into everlasting joy. It is this wisdom, my brother, that we must ask of God with ardent prayer, following the advice of St James,[27] and which we must extract like a treasure from the veins of divine Scripture, as the wise man tells us.[28]

The beginning of this wisdom is to know thyself,[29] a saying that antiquity believed to have come down from heaven[30] and that found such acceptance with the great authors that they considered it to be the epitome of all wisdom. But this teaching would have little authority for us if it did not accord with the Scriptures. The mystical lover in the Canticles threatens his spouse and orders her to depart if she does not know herself: 'If you do not know yourself, fairest among women, go forth and follow in the path of your flock.'[31] But let no one rashly lay claim to possessing such wisdom that he is sufficiently known to himself. I doubt whether anyone has an accurate knowledge of his body, and are we to think that anyone at all will be conscious of his own state of mind? Paul, who was privileged to learn the mysteries of the third heaven,[32] does not presume to judge himself;[33] he would have done so if he knew himself sufficiently. If a man so spiritual that he judges all things but is not subject to judgment himself[34] was still so little known to himself, what self-assurance can we carnal creatures have? Furthermore, a soldier who is not familiar either with his own troops or with those of the enemy would be regarded as quite worthless. But this is not a war between one man and another, but a war with oneself, and the enemy battle line springs forth unbidden from our own entrails, just as in the fables poets tell about the brothers sprung from the earth.[35] A friend is so barely distinguishable from an enemy that there is great danger that we may inadvertently defend an enemy as if he were a friend or wound a friend thinking him to be an enemy. That great leader stopped dead in his tracks before the angel of light, saying: 'Are you one of us or one of the foe?'[36] Therefore since you have entered into war with yourself, and since your greatest hope of victory lies in knowing yourself as fully as possible, I shall set before you a kind of likeness of yourself, as in a painting, so that you may have a clear knowledge of what you are on the inside and what you are skin-deep.[37]

On the outer and inner man

Man is a marvellous creature composed of two or three very diverse parts, a soul which is like a divinity and a body which is like a brute beast. Indeed, as far as the body is concerned, so far are we from surpassing the rest of brute creation that we are actually found inferior to them in every physical endowment. But with regard to the soul we have such a capacity for divinity that we can soar past the minds of the angels and become one with God. If the body had not been added to you, you would be a divinity; if the mind had not been bestowed upon you, you would be a beast.[1] These two divergent natures were joined together in happy concord by the supreme craftsman, but the serpent, the enemy of peace, split them apart again in unhappy discord, so that now they cannot be separated without the greatest torment or live together without incessant warfare. One might say of them that each with regard to the other 'holds the wolf by the ears,'[2] or one might aptly cite that charming little verse to describe them: 'I can live neither with you nor without you.'[3] Such is their confused turmoil and strife that they seem to be distinct from one another, although they are one. Since the body is itself visible, it takes pleasure in things visible. Since it is mortal, it pursues temporal things; since it is heavy, it sinks downward. On the contrary, the soul, remembering its heavenly origin, strives upwards with all its might and struggles against its earthly burden. It despises those things that are seen, for it knows that they are transitory; it seeks those that are true and eternal. Being immortal, it loves things immortal; being heavenly, it loves that which is heavenly. Like is attracted to like, unless it has been thoroughly immersed in the impurity of the body and by contagion from it has degenerated from its native nobility. And it was not the fabled Prometheus who implanted this discord by mixing a particle from every living thing in our minds,[4] nor was it instilled into us by our primitive nature, but sin corrupted that which had been well put together, sowing the poison of dissension between two harmonious entities. Previously the mind commanded the body without any trouble, and the body obeyed the mind freely and willingly. Now on the contrary, with the natural order of things disturbed, the passions of the body strive to have dominion over reason, and reason is forced to accede to the wishes of the body.

That is why the heart of man is not inaptly compared to a turbulent republic, which, since it is made up of different kinds of men, is subject to frequent upheavals and conflicts because of discordant interests, unless supreme power is vested in one man, who will ordain nothing that is not for the best welfare of the state. To this end it is necessary that he who is wiser should have more power and he who is less wise should obey.[5] There is nothing more senseless than the common herd of the people, and therefore they should obey the magistrates and hold no office themselves. The nobility and those superior in years[6] should be listened to in deliberations provided that the full power of the decision rests with the king alone, who should occasionally be advised, but never constrained or overruled. The king himself should obey none but the law, and the law corresponds to the idea of the good. But if by a reversal of roles the ungovernable crowd and the unruly dregs of society strive to dictate to the elders, or if the nobility fails to respect the power of the king, a dangerous tumult arises in our republic, and unless a divine dictatorship comes to its aid, everything plunges into ruin.

In man reason plays the role of king. Corresponding to the nobles are certain physical but not brutish emotions, like filial respect for one's parents, love for one's brothers and sisters, kindness towards friends, compassion for the afflicted, fear of disgrace, desire for a good reputation, and similar qualities. As for those passions of the soul that are furthest removed from the dictates of reason and are debased to the lowliness of beasts, consider these to be like the lowest dregs of the masses. Of this kind are lust, debauchery, envy, and similar disorders of the mind, which should all without exception be consigned to forced labour like vile and wicked slaves, so that, if they are able, they may produce the work and services required of them by their master, or, if not, at least not cause any harm.

With divinely inspired knowledge of all these things, Plato wrote in the *Timaeus* that the children of the gods had fashioned in man in their own image[7] a soul composed of two parts, one divine and immortal, and the other mortal and subject to various disorders.[8] The first of these is pleasure, the bait of evil,[9] as he said; next is pain, which causes us to flee from good and puts obstacles in its path; then come fear and recklessness, foolish counsellors. To these are added implacable anger as well as delusive hope, together with irrational feelings and love, which stops at nothing. Such are

Plato's views almost word for word. It did not escape him, either, that happiness in life consists in repressing such disorders. He writes in this same work that those who subdue these passions will live justly and those who are vanquished by them will live unjustly.[10] And he established the seat of the divine soul, that is, reason, in the brain, as if in the citadel of our city,[11] like a king, in the loftiest part of the body nearest to the heavens. It is the least brutish part of the body since it is made up of very fine bony material, not encumbered by sinews and flesh, but very well protected by internal and external senses, so that through their messages, as it were, no uprisings can take place in the republic without its being fully conscious of them immediately.[12] But the mortal parts of the soul, namely, the passions, according as they are either too compliant or too antagonistic to man, he removed from the divine soul. Between the brain and the midriff he placed that part of the soul which partakes of courage and wrath,[13] the latter a passion that is rebellious and must be held in check, but is not entirely bestial. For that reason he placed it midway between the upper and the lower parts, for if it were too close, it would disturb the king's tranquillity, or if corrupted by contact with the base populace, would conspire with them against him. He confined the appetitive instinct, which is attracted to food and drink and by which we are driven to the pleasures of Venus, below the midriff to the region of the liver and the belly, far from the royal seat, so that it might live there in a stall like a wild, untamed animal,[14] because it is in the habit of inciting violent uprisings and is least obedient to the orders of the commander. Proof of the brutish and rebellious nature of this lowest part is that shameful part of the body,[15] where concupiscence most exercises its tyranny, which alone of all the members foments rebellion with obscene movements despite the vain protests of the king.

You can see now how man, who began in his upper portion as a divine creature, in his lowest portion takes on the form of a beast. But the divine counsellor, presiding in the high citadel, conscious of his origin, does not contemplate anything mean or lowly. Resplendent with his ivory sceptre, he ordains nothing that is not morally right, and at the top of this sceptre an eagle is perched,[16] as Homer wrote, because as it flies aloft towards heavenly realms, it despises with its eagle eyes things that are on the ground. Lastly, this counsellor is wreathed with a crown of gold, for gold in the sacred Scripture usually represents wisdom, and the circle signifies perfect wisdom, complete in all its parts. These are the qualities proper to kings: first, that they have the highest degree of wisdom so that they may not sin by error, and then, that they desire only those things that are right so that they do not act injudiciously or perversely against the judgment of the mind. If anyone lacks either of these qualities, consider him not a king but a robber.

On the diversity of the passions

As a consequence of the divine law that is engraved in him, our king [reason] can be overthrown, but he cannot be corrupted without protesting and seeking redress. If the remaining part of the republic, the common people, obey him, he will never commit any action that is regrettable or pernicious, but everything will be carried out with great moderation and tranquillity. It is true that the Stoics and the Peripatetics have slightly different views on the passions, but there is universal agreement that we must live according to reason and not according to the passions. The Stoics believe that when you have used as guides those passions that are awakened most directly by the senses and have arrived at the point of being able to judge and discriminate what is to be sought after and what avoided, then they should be abandoned altogether. From then on not only are they useless for the attaining of wisdom, but even detrimental. For this reason they wish that the perfect wise man should be free of such promptings as if they were diseases of the mind. Even the more indulgent among them scarcely concede to the wise man those first impulses that precede reason, which they call fantasies.[1] But the Peripatetics teach that the passions are not to be eradicated, but subdued.[2] They consider them to be of some use, imparted to us by nature as incentives and inducements to virtue, such as anger as an incentive to courage, or envy to industry, and so with the rest. Socrates in the *Phaedo* appears to agree with the Stoics when he says that philosophy is nothing other than meditation upon death,[3] that is to say, that the mind should withdraw itself as much as possible from corporeal and sensible things and transport itself to those things that are perceived by reason, not by the senses.

It is necessary, therefore, to have a thorough knowledge of all the impulses of the soul, and to know that there are none so violent that they cannot be restrained by reason and redirected towards virtue. I hear on all sides the insidious opinion that one is compelled to vice. Others, ignorant of their own natures, follow impulses of this kind as if they were the dictates of reason, to such an extent that what has been prompted by jealousy or envy they call the zeal of God. And as one state is more strife-ridden than another, so one person is more inclined to virtue than another. Such differences do not proceed from any fundamental diversity of minds, but from the influence of heavenly bodies, or one's ancestors, or education, or physical make-up. Socrates' fable about the charioteers and the good and bad horses is no old wives' tale.[4] Some are born with such a moderate disposition and are so tractable and compliant that they can be instructed in the path of virtue without difficulty and make progress of their own accord without any prodding. Others have been allotted a rebellious body, like an untamed, recalcitrant horse, which the trainer for all his exertions can barely keep in check either with the roughest bridle or with whip and spurs, when it is in a rage. If such a body has fallen to your lot, do not lose heart right away, but strive all the more intensely, convinced that the path to virtue has not been blocked off from you, but that a richer opportunity for the practice of virtue has been afforded you. If instead you have been endowed with a good temperament, this is not to say that you are better than another, but merely more fortunate, and since more fortunate, also more beholden. But then, who is of such a happy disposition that there are not more than enough problems with which he must contend?

Therefore, the king [reason] must be most vigilant where he perceives there is most turmoil. Certain vices seem to be characteristic of certain peoples, such as perfidy of some nations, extravagance of others, lust of others. Some vices are associated with one's physical constitution, such as passion for women and love of sensual pleasures in the sanguine; anger, ferocity, and abusiveness in the choleric; inertia and sluggishness in the phlegmatic; envy, sadness, and bitterness in the melancholic. Other vices either abate or grow stronger with age, such as lust, prodigality, and impetuosity in youth, and parsimony, ill humour, and avarice in old age. Others seems to be related to sex, such as violence in men, vanity and desire for revenge in women. Sometimes it happens that nature, squaring the account, as it were, compensates a defect of the mind with other good qualities. One man may be inclined towards sensual pleasure, but he is not at all prone to anger or jealousy. Another is a man of unblemished chastity, but somewhat haughty, irascible, and attentive to his own interests. Nor is there any lack of those who are tormented by monstrous and deadly vices like theft, sacrilege, and murder, which must be countered with every effort, and against whose assault we must interpose a bronze wall of firm determination. On the other hand, there are some passions that are so similar to virtues that there is a risk of being deceived in distinguishing between them. These will have to be corrected and appropriately deflected towards the nearest virtue. For example, one who is hot-tempered should curb his feelings, and he will become energetic, self-assured, active, free, and open. Another who is a bit niggardly with a little good sense will become frugal; one who is too flattering will become affable and courteous; one who is inflexible, constant; one who is sombre, stern; one who is foolish, obliging; and similarly with other minor defects of character. We must merely be careful not to disguise a vice of nature with the name of virtue, calling depression gravity, harshness sternness, envy zeal, stinginess frugality, adulation friendliness, or scurrility wit.

Therefore, the only road to happiness is first to know yourself and then not to act in anything according to the passions but in all things according to the judgment of reason. But reason must be sane and sagacious, that is, it must look only to what is honourable. But what you prescribe is difficult, you will say. Who will deny it? And yet Plato's saying still holds true, that what is beautiful is also difficult.[5] Nothing requires more courage than to conquer oneself, but there is no greater reward than happiness. St Jerome expressed it very well,[6] as he did everything else. No one is happier than the Christian, since he is promised the kingdom of heaven. No one endures more hardship than he whose life is daily in danger. No one is stronger than he who vanquishes the devil. No one is weaker than he who is overcome by the flesh. If you weigh carefully your own strength, nothing is more difficult than subjecting the flesh to the spirit, but if you have recourse to God as your helper, nothing is easier. You must only conceive in your mind with great courage the ideal of the perfect life, and once it has been conceived, pursue it with vigour. The human mind has never made vehement demands upon itself that it has not accomplished.

A very important part of Christianity is to want to be a Christian with all one's heart and soul. What seems at first to be unattainable becomes more accessible as one progresses, easier with practice, and in the end even pleasant through custom. The poet Hesiod expressed it wisely: 'The path of virtue is steep at first, but when you have clambered up to the top, the surest peace awaits you.'[7] No animal is so ferocious that it cannot be tamed by human care. Can it be that there is no way of taming the spirit, the tamer of all things? To maintain the body in good health you are able to force yourself to be abstemious and to give up the pleasures of Venus for years at a time, following the prescriptions of a doctor, a mere man. Can you not control your passions even for a few months so that you may spend your whole life in peace, as God your creator commands? To deliver the body from sickness you do all in your power, but to deliver body and soul from everlasting death you will not do what even the pagans did?

On the inner and outer man, and on the two parts of man according to the sacred Scriptures

I am truly ashamed of those who profess themselves to be Christians, the majority of whom are slaves to their passions like brute beasts and are so untrained in this struggle that they do not even know how to distinguish between reason and passion. They think that man is only what they see and feel. In fact, they think that anything that is not perceptible to the senses does not exist, although nothing could be further from the truth. Whatever they desire immoderately they consider to be good. What is a sure and deplorable servitude they call peace, while beclouded reason follows without objection wherever passion calls. This is that hapless peace which Christ, the author of true peace, who made the two one,[1] came to destroy[2] by stirring up salutary warfare between father and son, husband and wife, and between those things which a base accord has badly joined together.

The authority of the philosophers would be of little effect if all those same teachings were not contained in the sacred Scriptures, even if not in the same words. What the philosophers call reason Paul calls either spirit or the inner man or the law of the mind. What they call passions he calls the flesh, the body, the outer man, or the law of the members. 'Walk in the spirit,' he says, 'and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, so that you do not do everything you would wish.'[3] And elsewhere: 'If you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the spirit you annihilate the deeds of the flesh, you will live.'[4] It is a complete reversal of things to seek peace in war, war in peace, life in death, death in life, freedom in slavery, slavery in freedom. As Paul writes in another place: 'I punish my body and I reduce it to slavery.'[5] Listen to what he says about freedom: 'But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law,'[6] and: 'We have not received again the spirit of slavery in fear, but the spirit of adoption as children of God.'[7] The same thought occurs elsewhere: 'I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin that is in my members.'[8]

You read in this same writer about the outer man, who is corrupted, and the inner man, who is renewed from day to day.[9] Plato distinguished two souls in man.[10] Paul in one and the same man puts two men, stuck together in such a way that neither will be in glory or in hell without the other, but on the other hand so distinct that the death of one is the life of the other. What he writes to the Corinthians is also relevant in this regard, in my opinion. 'The first man was made into a living soul, the last Adam into a life-giving soul. But it is not the spiritual which came first, but the physical and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second from heaven, heavenly.'[11] But to make it more evident that this applies not only to Christ and Adam, but to all of us, he added: 'As was the earthly man, so also are those who are of the earth, and as was the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. Therefore if we have borne the image of the earthly man, let us also bear the image of the heavenly man. I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God, nor shall the corruptible inherit the incorruptible.'[12] You can perceive clearly that what in another context he spoke of as the flesh and the outer corruptible man he here calls the earthly Adam. This is without a doubt also that 'body of death' under whose burden Paul cried out: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will free me from the body of this death?'[13]

Again, pointing out that the fruits of the flesh are very different from those of the spirit, he writes in another place: 'He who sows in his flesh will also reap corruption from the flesh, but he who sows in the spirit will reap life eternal from the spirit.'[14] This explains that famous antagonism of old between the twin brothers Esau and Jacob,[15] who before they were issued into the light of day were already in conflict within the enclosure of their mother's womb.[16] Esau was the first to be born, but Jacob pre-empted him in securing the benediction.[17] This is to show that the carnal comes first, but the spiritual is preferred. One was red-haired[18] and covered with hair, the other was smooth-skinned.[19] One was a restless hunter, the other enjoyed remaining peacefully at home. Feeling pangs of hunger, Esau sold his birthright,[20] and enticed by the base rewards of pleasure he fell from his native liberty into the slavery of sinners. Jacob by his art of diplomacy won for himself what was not owed to him by right. Between these twin brothers of the same womb there was never any perfect agreement. Esau hated Jacob.[21] Jacob on his part, while not returning this hatred, fled the company of his brother, held him always in suspicion, and did not confide in him. Likewise you should suspect whatever the passions suggest to you because of the dubious reliability of the one giving the advice. Only Jacob saw the Lord.[22] Esau lived by the sword like a man of violence. Finally, when the Lord was consulted by their mother, he answered: 'The elder shall serve the younger.'[23] His father also added: 'You shall serve your brother. Then the time will come when you will shake off and loose the yoke from your neck.'[24] The Lord prophesies about those who remain faithful, the father about those who are rejected. The Lord points out what everyone should do, the father predicts what the majority will do.

Paul wishes the woman to be subject to her husband. 'A man's wickedness is preferable to a woman's kindness.'[25] The carnal passions are our Eve,[26] whose glance the clever serpent attracts daily. When she has been corrupted, she proceeds to tempt her spouse to participate with her in the evil. But what do you read about the new woman, the one who is obedient to her husband? 'I shall create enmity between you' (obviously the serpent) 'and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. She will crush your head, and you will strike insidiously at her heel.'[27] The serpent has been thrown down on its belly; the death of Christ has broken the force of his attack. All he can do is lie in wait to strike blows at her heel from ambush. But by the power of faith the woman has been turned into a female warrior and with great heroism crushes his poisonous head. Grace has been increased; the tyranny of the flesh has been diminished. When by God's authority

Sara's honour was diminished,[28] Abraham's honour was enhanced, and from then on she did not call him husband, but lord. Nevertheless she was not deemed worthy of giving birth until her menstruations had ceased. Old and worn out as she was, what did she bear to her lord Abraham? Isaac, of course, which means 'joy.'[29] As soon as the passions have grown old in man, then at last that happy tranquillity of an innocent soul and security of mind arise, like an unending banquet.[30] And as the father was not indulgent to his wife, so with regard to the children she looked with suspicion at Isaac and Ishmael's playing together. She did not wish that the son of a handmaid should associate with the son of a free woman at that youthful age.[31] While he was still in the fervour of youth, Ismael was sent away so that he would not win Isaac over to his ways by flattering inducements while he was still a young boy. By now Abraham had grown old, Sara was an old woman, and had already given birth to Isaac, but he still distrusted her, except that a divine oracle confirmed the good judgment of his wife. He was not sure of his wife until he heard from the Lord: 'In all that Sara will tell you give heed to her words.'[32] O blessed old age of those in whom the earthly man is already so dead that it presents no trouble to the spirit!

I for my part should not venture to assert that such perfect concord in all matters can be granted to man in this life. Perhaps it would not even be advantageous. For Paul was given a thorn in the flesh,[33] an angel of Satan, to buffet him, and when he implored the Lord for the third time that it be taken away, he heard only this: 'Paul, my grace suffices for you, for strength is made perfect in weakness.'[34] This is a strange kind of remedy, to be sure: in order not to become proud Paul is tempted by pride; in order that he be unwavering in Christ, he is forced to be weak in himself. In fact, he carried the treasures of heavenly revelation in a vessel of clay[35] to show that such transcendent power came from God and not from himself. This single example of the Apostle admonishes us about many other things at the same time: first, that when we are troubled by vice, we must implore divine assistance immediately by repeated prayers; next, that at times temptations are not only not dangerous for those who are perfect but are even necessary for the preservation of virtue; and lastly, that when all other vices have been subdued, the sole vice of vainglory is still lurking even in the midst of virtue, like the hydra that attacked Hercules,[36] an indestructible monster that reproduces itself from its own wounds, which at the very end, after enduring every toil, we can barely defeat. But 'relentless labour masters all.'[37]

In the mean while, as the soul is agitated by vehement passions, press the attack, push on, fall upon him, using every means, and hold this Proteus fast with viselike bonds as 'in wondrous transformation he becomes / Fire and hideous beast and flowing stream'[38] until he returns to his original form. What is so protean as the passions and desires of the foolish? Are not the words of the learned poet perfectly appropriate to describe how they are dragged into bestial lust, wild anger, venomous envy, and other monstrous vices?

> Of various beasts he takes the differing shapes,
> Now like a bristly boar, or deadly tiger,
> Now scaly snake or tawny lioness
> Or crackling sound of fire.[39]

Be sure to remember the lines that follow:

> The more new forms and shapes you see him take
> The more draw tight the tautened bonds.[40]

Or, not to resort again to poetic fables, take for your model the holy patriarch Jacob, and press on steadfastly in this nocturnal struggle until the dawn of divine help will shine upon you, and say: 'I shall not let you go until you give me your blessing.'[41]

It would be worth our while to hear of the reward this mighty wrestler received for his virtue. First the angel blest him in that very spot. For after conquering temptation man is always given a surplus of divine grace so that he will be much more fortified for the next attack of the enemy. Then since he had been struck in the thigh-bone,[42] the victor's muscle shrivelled up and he began to limp on one leg. Through the mouth of the prophet[43] God curses those who limp on both legs,[44] that is, those who wish to remain in the flesh and please God at the same time, and as they do not succeed in either, limp on both legs. Happy are those in whom the passion of the flesh has so died out by the touch of God that they support themselves on their right leg, that is, the spirit. Lastly, his name was changed. From Jacob he became Israel,[45] from a wrestler he became a peaceful man. When you have chastised your flesh[46] and crucified it with its vices and concupiscences, with none to oppose you, peace and tranquillity will be yours to be free to see the Lord, to 'taste and see how sweet is the Lord.'[47] That is the meaning of the name Israel.[48] He is not seen in the fire or in the whirlwind and tumult of temptations,[49] but if you weather the tempest of the devil, the gentle breeze of spiritual consolation will follow. As soon as it breathes softly upon you, focus the vision of the mind intently, and you will be Israel, and you will say with him: 'I have seen the Lord, and my soul has been saved.'[50] You will see him who said: 'No flesh will see me.'[51] Examine yourself: if you are flesh, you will not see the Lord; if you do not see him, your soul will not be saved. Take care, then, that you be spirit.

On the three parts of man: spirit, soul, and flesh

What I have said thus far has perhaps been more than sufficient, but in order that you be even more enlightened and self-aware, I should like to touch briefly on the teachings of Origen concerning the division of man.[1] Following Paul he divides man into three parts – spirit, soul, and flesh, which the Apostle associated together when he wrote to the Thessalonians: 'May your body, soul, and spirit be kept sound for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.'[2] Isaiah, omitting the lower part, mentions two. 'My soul,' he said, 'will long for you in the night, but also in my spirit and in my inmost being I shall watch for you until the morning.'[3] Likewise Daniel: 'Spirits and souls of the just, praise the Lord.'[4] From these passages Origen concludes with good reason that there are three parts in man: first, the body or the flesh, the lowest part of us, in which through the fault of our first parents the cunning serpent has inscribed the law of sin, and by which we are incited to base actions and once vanquished, joined to the devil; second, the spirit, by which we reproduce a likeness of the divine nature, in which the supreme maker has engraved with his finger, that is, his Spirit, the eternal law of goodness, drawn from the archetype of his own mind, by which we are glued to God and are made one with him; finally, he established a third and middle soul between the other two, which is capable of sensations and natural movements.

As in a republic rent by factions, the soul cannot but attach itself to one of the two sides; solicited on this side and on that, it is free to incline to whichever direction it wishes. If it renounces the flesh and goes over to the side of the spirit, it will itself become spiritual, but if it abandons itself to the cupidities of the flesh, it will degenerate into the body. This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians: 'Do you not know that he who has relations with a harlot becomes one body with her, but he who clings to the Lord is one spirit with him?'[5] He calls a part of man a cunning harlot. She is that alluring and seductive woman of whom you read in the second chapter of Proverbs: 'That you may be saved from the adulterous woman and from the foreign woman with her smooth words, who forsakes the partner of her youth and has forgotten the covenant of her God. For her house sinks down towards death and her paths to the Shades. Of all those who frequent her company none will return nor recover the paths of life.'[6] And in the sixth chapter: 'May they preserve you from the wicked woman and from the deceitful tongue of the foreign woman. May your heart not desire her beauty; do not be captivated by her beckoning glances. The price of a harlot is a loaf of bread, but the adulteress makes off with a priceless soul.'[7] When the author of Proverbs mentions harlot, heart, and soul, has he not specifically indicated the three parts of man? Again in the ninth chapter: 'She is a stupid woman, loud and full of seductions and ignorant of everything. She sits at the door of her house in a place overlooking the city so that she can call out to the passers-by as they go their way: "Who is the poor waif who would like to turn off here?" And to the fool she says: "Stolen water is sweeter, and bread eaten in secret is more tasty." And the fool does not know that the Shades are there, and that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.'[8] Whoever associates himself with her will go down to hell, and whoever takes leave of her will be saved. I ask you, with what colours could one more graphically depict or describe the venomous allurements of the flesh when it entices the soul to shameful pleasure, or of depravity when it protests against the spirit, or better describe the ominous success of the flesh when it triumphs over the spirit?

Therefore the spirit makes us gods, the flesh makes us brute animals. The soul constitutes us as human beings; the spirit makes us religious, the flesh irreligious, the soul neither the one nor the other. The spirit seeks heavenly things, the flesh seeks pleasure, the soul what is necessary. The spirit elevates us to heaven, the flesh drags us down to hell, the soul has no charge imputed to it. Whatever is carnal is base, whatever is spiritual is perfect, whatever belongs to the soul as life-giving element is in between and indifferent.

Do you wish me to point out to you the distinction between these parts in more concrete language?[9] I shall attempt to do so. You respect your parents; you love your brother; you love your children; you cherish your friend. It is not so much a virtue to do such things as it is unnaturally wicked not to do them. Why would you, a Christian, not do what even pagans do by natural instinct, or even what brute animals do? Whatever comes from nature cannot be ascribed to merit. But if you find yourself in a situation in which you must either neglect your duties to your father, triumph over your affection for your children, disregard the devotion owed to a friend, or offend God, what will you do? Your soul stands at the crossroads. The flesh solicits us on one side, the spirit on the other. The spirit says: 'God is to be preferred to one's parent. To the latter you owe merely your body, to God you owe everything.' The flesh suggests: 'If you do not obey, your father will disinherit you, and people will say that you have no respect for your father. Be practical, think of your reputation. God will either not see it, or will ignore it, or at any rate will easily be appeased.' Your soul wavers and vacillates. Whichever way it turns, it will become that which it accedes to. If, in contempt of the spirit,[10] it harkens to the harlot, that is, the flesh, it becomes one with the body. But if, despising the flesh, it is raised up to the spirit, it is transformed into the spirit.

Accustom yourself to this mode of shrewd self-examination. It is a great error of mankind to think that what is merely an instinct of nature is perfect piety. If you are not careful, you can be deceived by certain passions that seem honourable in appearance and are disguised with the mask of virtue. A judge inveighs sternly against a criminal and thinks of himself as incorruptible. Shall we discuss this case? If he gratifies his own character and yields to a certain native rigidity, without experiencing any feelings of remorse, in fact deriving a certain satisfaction, but never deviating from his role of judge or feeling too complacent with himself, then what he does is ordinary, neither virtue nor vice. But if he abuses the law for his own private hatred or cupidity, his action is carnal, and he commits a murder. If he feels immense sorrow in his heart that he must sentence to death one whom he would prefer to be free of blame and not in danger of death, if he inflicts the deserved penalty upon the accused with the same sentiments that a father has in ordering his dearest son to be cut open and cauterized, then only is his action spiritual.

Many people are attracted or repelled by certain things through natural propensities or traits of character. There are some who are never titillated by the pleasures of the flesh. They should not attribute to their own virtue something that is in itself indifferent. It is a virtue to conquer lust, not simply to be free of it. Another finds pleasure in fasting, attending religious ceremonies, going to church regularly, reciting as many psalms as possible, but in the spirit. Submit his actions to this criterion. If he is seeking a good reputation or gain, his action smacks of the flesh, not the spirit. If he is merely gratifying his own inclinations and doing what he feels like doing, he has no reason to be inordinately pleased with himself – on the contrary, he has reason to fear. This is the danger you incur. You pray, and you judge one who does not pray. You fast, and you condemn your brother for eating.[11] If someone does not do what you do, do you think you are better than he on that account? Be careful that your fasting does not pertain to the flesh. A brother has need of your help, but you mumble your miserable little prayers to God while ignoring the need of your brother. God will not be favourable to your prayers. How will God hear your prayers when you do not hear your fellow man? Or to use another example, you love your wife for the simple reason that she is your wife. That is no great feat, for you share this in common with the pagans. Or you love her merely because she gives you pleasure. Then your love is carnal. But if you love her above all because you perceive in her the image of Christ, for example, piety, modesty, sobriety, and chastity, and you no longer love her in herself but in Christ, or rather Christ in her, then your love is spiritual. I shall return to this discussion in the proper context.

Some general rules of true Christianity

Now that we seem to have opened up the path to our subject to some extent and have provided a mass of material, we must hasten on to the rest before this handbook becomes a huge tome. We shall attempt to impart some rules briefly as if they were wrestling holds, so that using them as a guide, like the thread of Ariadne, you may disentangle yourself from the errors of this world as from an inextricable labyrinth and attain to the pure light of the spiritual life. Every discipline has its own rules; can it be that only the design for a holy life is without the benefit of a system of rules? Indeed there is in general an art and discipline of virtue, in which those who exercise themselves diligently will be inspired by the Spirit, the fosterer of pious impulses. But those who say: 'Depart from us, we do not wish to learn your ways'[1] will be rejected by divine mercy, because they themselves rejected knowledge.

These rules will be taken partly from the person of God, the devil, and ourselves; partly from things, that is, virtues, vices, and things connected with them; and partly from the material of which virtues and vices are composed. They will be especially effective against three evils, which are the vestiges of original sin. For even if baptism has removed the stain, nevertheless a residue of the old malady remains in us both as a safeguard of humility and as raw material and a fertile terrain for virtue. The three evils are blindness, the flesh, and weakness. Blindness is a cloud of ignorance that obscures the judgment of reason. First, the pure light of the divine countenance, which the creator had instilled in us, was partially obscured by the sin of our first parents. Then faulty upbringing, evil companionship, perverse desires, the darkness of vice, and the habit of sin have so covered it over with mildew that only the barest traces of the law divinely engraved in us are visible. Therefore, as I began to say, blindness makes us incapable of distinguishing in our choice of things, so that we pursue the worst instead of the best, and choose the less profitable over what should be preferred to it. The flesh influences the passions in such a way that even if we recognize what is best, we love the very opposite. Weakness causes us to give in to weariness or temptation and thus abandon virtue once we have acquired it. Blindness impairs judgment, the flesh corrupts the will, and weakness destroys constancy. Therefore, you must first know how to distinguish between things to be avoided and things to be sought after, and to that end we must rid ourselves of blindness so that we are not befuddled in our choice of things. Next, you must hate evil once you have recognized it, and love good, and in this the flesh must be conquered so that you will not be tempted to prefer the agreeable to the salutary contrary to the judgment of reason. Thirdly, you must persevere in good undertakings, and for that reason weakness must be bolstered so that we do not abandon the path of virtue, which would be worse than if we had never embarked upon it. Ignorance must be remedied so that you may see which road you must take. The flesh must be subdued lest it lead you astray from the familiar path into devious ways. Weakness must be stimulated so that once you have entered upon the narrow way you will not falter, or stop, or turn off, or look back after you have put your hand to the plough.[2] On the contrary, rejoice like an athlete eager to run his race,[3] reaching out always to what is before you,[4] forgetful of what lies behind, until you achieve the prize and the crown promised to those who persevere.[5] Against these three evil effects of sin we shall provide some rules as best we can.

The first rule, against the evil of ignorance

Since faith is the only avenue to Christ, it is fitting that the first rule should be to understand fully what the Scriptures tell us about Christ and his Spirit, and to believe this not only by mere lip service, not coldly or listlessly or hesitantly, as does the common lot of Christians, but with your whole heart, with the deep and unshaken conviction that there is not one tiniest detail contained therein that does not pertain to your salvation. Do not be swayed by the fact that you observe the majority of mankind living as if heaven and hell were some sort of old wives' tales,[1] bugbears, or childish enticements. But do not be impatient in your belief. Even if the whole world without exception were to go mad, if the whole natural order were to be turned upside-down, if the angels were to rebel, the truth cannot lie, and what God predicted would come about must inevitably come about. If you believe that God exists, you must believe that he is truthful. Be assured that there is nothing so true, nothing so certain and beyond all doubt of all that you take in with your ears, behold with your eyes, or touch with your hands than what you read in these writings. They have been inspired by heavenly divinity, that is, by Truth; handed down by the holy prophets, sealed by the blood of martyrs, attested to by the unanimous concurrence of generations of saintly men; taught by word by Christ himself, incarnate, and exemplified in his life; proven by miracles; confessed and believed in by demons to the point that they tremble with fear.[2] In short, if the Scriptures alone are in such agreement with the laws of nature, so coherent, and so capable of captivating, inspiring, and transforming those who read them with attention, what manner of perversity is it, by all that's holy, to be wavering in one's faith? Infer from past events what will happen in the future. How many incredible predictions did the prophets make concerning Christ? Which of these was not fulfilled? Will he who did not deceive in these matters deceive in others? Finally, if the prophets did not lie, will Christ, the lord of the prophets, lie?

If you will revive the flame of faith from time to time with these and similar reflections, and ask fervently of God to increase your faith,[3] I should be surprised if you can remain wicked for very long. For who is so unregenerate that he will not recoil from vice if he would only consider seriously that for these momentary pleasures he is procuring eternal torments for himself through the pangs of a remorseful conscience, while the pious in return for temporary and slight vexations are repaid the hundredfold joy[4] of a pure conscience and, in the end, eternal life?

Second rule

The first rule, therefore, is not to have any doubts concerning the divine promises. The second is that you enter upon the road of salvation not hesitantly or timidly, but with resolute purpose, wholeheartedly, and with a trusting and, so to speak, gladiatorial heart,[1] ready to suffer the loss of your fortunes or your life for Christ's sake. The sluggard shilly-shallies. The kingdom of heaven does not fall to the vacillating, but it is glad to suffer violence,[2] and the violent take it by force. While you are hastening to this goal, you must not allow yourself to be detained by the affection of your dear ones or distracted by the enticements of the world or held back by domestic cares. The chain of worldly affairs must be severed if it cannot be untwisted. You must leave Egypt behind in such a way as never to return in mind to its fleshpots.[3] Sodom must be abandoned with all haste once and for all; it is forbidden to look back. The woman looked back, and she was turned into a stone pillar.[4] Her husband had no time to linger anywhere, but he was ordered to flee to the mountains if he did not wish to perish. The prophet cries out to us to flee from the midst of Babylon.[5] The exodus from Egypt is called a flight. We are bidden to flee Babylon, not to emigrate gradually and hesitantly. You may see most people putting off their departure to the next day and planning their flight from vice in too dilatory a manner. 'When I shall be free of these concerns, when I finish this or that matter of business,' they say. 'Fool, what if this very day they require your soul of you?'[6] Don't you know that one business affair generates another, and vice breeds vice? Why don't you do today what will be so much the easier the more quickly you attend to it? Be scrupulous in some other matter; here headlong speed is required. Don't make calculations, don't give weighty thought to how much you are giving up, being certain that Christ alone will be sufficient compensation to you for everything. Dare to trust in him with all your heart. Dare to have no confidence in yourself; dare to transfer all your cares to him. Cease to rely upon yourself and with full confidence abandon yourself to him and he will take you under his care.[7] Throw your cares upon the Lord,[8] and he will nurture you so that you may sing this song of the same prophet: 'The Lord is my shepherd, and nothing will be lacking to me in the pasture where he has placed me. He has led me to refreshing waters; he has revived my soul.'[9]

Do not try to divide yourself between the world and Christ. You cannot serve two masters.[10] There is no alliance between Christ and Belial.[11] He does not tolerate those who limp on both legs.[12] He spits out those who are neither cold nor hot, but only lukewarm.[13] God is an extremely jealous lover of souls, he wishes to possess solely and entirely what he has redeemed with his blood. He does not suffer any partnership with the devil, whom he has defeated decisively once and for all by his death. There are only two paths,[14] one which by the gratification of the passions leads to destruction, the other which by the mortification of the flesh leads to life. Why are you puzzled? There is no third way. Whether you wish to or not, you must enter on one of these two. Whoever you are, you must enter upon this narrow path, on which few mortals walk. But Christ himself has trodden it, and all those who were pleasing to God from the beginning of the world have trodden it. This is truly the inevitable necessity symbolized by the goddess Adrastea.[15] If you wish to live with Christ, you must be crucified to the world[16] with Christ.

Why do we delude ourselves, fools that we are? Why do we deceive ourselves in such an important matter? One man says: 'I am not a cleric, I am a man of the world; I cannot help but make use of the world.' Another one reasons: 'Even if I am a priest, I am not a monk; let him see to it.' The monk also finds a way of consoling himself: 'I am not so much a monk as this one or that one.' Another says: 'I am a young man of noble blood, rich, a courtier, even a prince. What was said to the apostles does not apply to me.' You poor wretch, does it not apply to you to live in Christ? If you are in the world, you are not in Christ. If you mean by the world the sky, the earth, the sea and the air we breathe, then there is no one who is not in the world. But if you mean by the world ambition, pleasures, greed, and lust, then certainly if you are of the world, you are not a Christian. Christ said to all men that whoever did not take up his cross and follow him was not worthy of him.[17] To die to the flesh with Christ is of no concern to you if living by his spirit is of no concern to you. To be crucified to the world does not concern you if to live for God does not concern you. To be buried with Christ[18] does not concern you if to rise into glory does not concern you. Christ's humility, his poverty, tribulation, humiliation, toils, exertions, and sorrows mean nothing to you if his kingdom means nothing to you. What is more unfair than to presume to share a reward with others while casting upon a certain few the burden of obtaining it? What is more selfish than to wish to reign with the Head but not suffer with him? Therefore, my dear brother, do not look about you to see what others do and flatter yourself in comparison with them. To die to sin, to die to carnal desires, to die to the world is an arduous goal, and there are very few, even among monks, who attain to it. Yet this is the common profession of all Christians. You swore to this long ago at baptism. What vow could be more holy or religious than that? We must either perish or advance resolutely along this path to salvation, 'be we kings or poorest peasants.'[19]

But if it is not granted to all to arrive at the perfect imitation of the Head, all must none the less strive with all their strength to reach it. He who has earnestly resolved to become a Christian has already acquired a good share of Christianity.

Third rule

But lest you be deterred from the path of virtue by the fact that it is harsh and forbidding, or that you must renounce the comforts of the world or wage a constant battle with the three relentless enemies, the flesh, the world, and the devil, set this third rule before your eyes. You must ignore, after the example of Virgil's Aeneas, all those spectres and phantasms which spring up before you as if you were at the very gates of hell.[1] If you disregard these vain illusions and examine things more seriously and intently, you will see clearly that the way of Christ is not only the only one that leads to happiness, but even without considering the reward it is the most advantageous one to follow. What manner of life according to the world would you choose, I ask you, in which there would not be countless trials and hardships to be undergone and endured? Who but the inexperienced or the most simple-minded is unaware that life at court is full of woes. Immortal God! What tedious and shameful servitude must be endured there! What constant attention is needed to win the favour of the prince and to wheedle the good will of those who can harm or benefit you. You must continually put on a new mask and accept silently the insults of the powerful. Then, what kind of hardship is not present in military life? You can be an excellent witness to both, since you experienced both at your own risk and peril. And what is there that the merchant does not do or suffer 'who flees the shame of poverty / Through sea and rocks and roaring flames'?[2] In marriage what a burden of domestic cares, how much misery is there for those who make trial of it? In the administration of public office how much anxiety, toil, and peril? Wherever you cast your eye, an immense crowd of troubles will appear. The life of mortals is itself exposed to a thousand woes common to just and unjust alike. All of these will accrue to the accumulation of merit if they befall you on the road of Christ. If not, they will have to be borne all the same with greater discomfort and no profit. Those who do military service for the world pant, sweat, and endure the tumult of battle for many years. And for what perishable and worthless concerns, and with such uncertain hope! Add to this that in the world there is no end to miseries, to such an extent that the longer you struggle the more troublesome it is. What is the end, may I ask, of such a harassed and laborious life? Everlasting torment.

Go now and compare the way of virtue with this life. It ceases immediately to be rough and becomes more gentle and pleasant as one progresses. Along this road one proceeds to the highest good with the surest of expectations. Would it not be utter insanity to expend the same effort to procure eternal death for oneself rather than immortal life? But they are even more foolish, since they choose to resign themselves with the greatest effort to unending toil rather than with a minimum of effort to attain everlasting peace. Moreover, even if the way of piety were infinitely more laborious than the way of the world, still the harshness of the struggle would be alleviated by the hope of a reward, and the unction of divine grace would not be lacking to change all gall into honey.[3] There care follows upon care, and one sorrow gives birth to another; there is no respite, no delay. Externally there is labour and affliction, internally more grievous anxiety. The assuagements themselves exasperate the ill. This truth did not elude the pagan poets, who through the torments of Tityus, Ixion, Tantalus, Sisyphus, and Pentheus[4] shadow forth the condemned existence of the wicked. Theirs is the tardy confession mentioned in the Book of Wisdom: 'We have become weary of the way of iniquity and perdition; we have traversed difficult roads, but we were ignorant of the way of the Lord.'[5] What is more shameful or more slavish than the bondage of Egypt? What is more pitiful than the captivity of Babylon? What is more unbearable than the yoke of the Pharaoh and of Nebuchadnezzar? What does Christ say? 'Take my yoke upon you, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.'[6]

In brief, no pleasure is lacking when there is a tranquil conscience. But no misery is absent when an unhappy conscience torments us. These must be regarded as matters of absolute certitude. But if you are doubtful, consult those who once turned to the Lord from the midst of Babylon and believe at least by their experience that there is nothing more disquieting and desolate than vice, nothing more unencumbered and cheerful than virtue. But come now, imagine that there were equal wages and equal labours in both campaigns. How much more desirable it would be to serve under the banners of Christ rather than under the ensigns of the devil. I should go farther – how much more desirable to suffer with Christ than to abound in the delights of the devil. Should you not flee over land and sea a master so vile, so harsh and deceitful, who exacts such an unequal task, and who makes such empty promises with which he often deludes his unfortunate victims? Or if he does hold out something, he takes it away again at his whim, so that those who acquired it with great effort suffer even greater distress in losing it? After the merchant by fair means and foul in his ambition to amass wealth has exposed his reputation, his life, and his soul to a thousand perils, even if the fall of the dice has been favourable, what has he gained for himself but a constant source of anxiety to preserve what he has gained and torment that he may lose it? And if fortune goes against him, what is left to him but to be doubly miserable, first for being deprived of what he had hoped for and second because of the painful memory of all the futile toil expended? No one who strives with determination after a good purpose will fail to achieve his goal. 'As Christ is not mocked, so also he does not mock.'[7]

Consider also that when you flee from the world to Christ, you are not relinquishing the advantages of the world but exchanging trivial things for those that are of greater value. Who would not be more than willing to exchange silver for gold or flint for precious stones? If your friends take offence, what of it? You will find more agreeable friends. You will be deprived of sensual pleasures, but you will enjoy inner pleasures, which are more gratifying, more unalloyed, and more certain. Your material possessions will be reduced; but that wealth will increase which neither moths may consume nor thieves plunder.[8] You will be held in less esteem by the world, but you will have the approval of Christ, your creator. You will be liked by fewer people, but better ones. The body grows thin, but the soul is fattened. The bloom of your complexion fades, but the radiance of the soul will begin to shine forth. And if you make similar reflections on other matters, you will find there is no false good left to the world that is not amply compensated by a much greater gain. If there are some blessings that it is sinful to desire excessively but not to possess, such as popular esteem, the favour of the crowd, charm, authority, friends, honour accruing from virtue, it often happens that all these things are given in addition,[9] without the asking, to those who seek first the kingdom of God, as Christ promised and as God provided for Solomon.[10] Fortune often follows those who flee from it, and flees those who follow it. Whatever happens to those who love [God] cannot but be favourable,[11] since for them losses are turned into gains, torment into solace, reproach into glory, suffering into pleasure, sadness into sweetness, evil into good. Are you still hesitant, then, to take this path and abandon the other, when the comparison is so unequal, or rather, non-existent, when you compare God to the devil, hope to hope, reward to reward, labour to labour, consolation to consolation?

Fourth rule

But in order that you may press forward towards happiness on a surer course, let this be your fourth rule: place Christ before you as the only goal of your life,[1] and direct to him alone all your pursuits, all your endeavors, all your leisure time and hours of occupation. Do not think of 'Christ' as an empty word, but that it stands for charity, simplicity, patience, purity, in brief, all that he has taught. By the word 'devil' understand anything that deters us from Christ's teachings. Whoever strives after virtue alone directs his course to Christ. Whoever is a slave to vice sells himself to the devil. Therefore 'let your eye be single, and your whole body will be filled with light.'[2] Let it look towards Christ alone as the sole and highest good, so that you love nothing, admire nothing, hope for nothing save Christ or because of Christ; hate nothing, dread nothing, flee nothing except for evil or because of evil. In this way whatever you do, whether you are asleep or awake,[3] whether you eat or drink, your amusements and pastimes, even, to speak more boldly, certain more venial vices, to which we sometimes fall victim in our progress toward virtue, will all be converted into an increase in your reward. But if your eye is not sound and you look elsewhere than towards Christ, even if you perform good actions, they will be unfruitful or even harmful. For it is a fault to perform a good action in an improper way.

As you hasten on a direct course towards the goal of the highest good, whatever you encounter on the way should be rejected or accepted according as it either facilitates or impedes your progress. In general these things fall into three categories.[4] Some are so evil that they can never be considered good, such as to avenge a wrong or to bear ill will towards someone. These are always to be shunned no matter how great the advantage to be gained and no matter what the torment. For nothing can harm a good man except for evil alone. Some things, on the contrary, are so intrinsically good that they cannot become evil, such as wishing well to all men, helping one's friends by honest means, hating vice, and enjoying pious conversations. Some are in between, such as good health, beauty, strength, eloquence, learning, and the like. Of this last class of things none should be sought after on its own account nor made use of to a greater or less extent except in so far as it leads to the supreme goal.

Even for the philosophers there exist certain imperfect and intermediate ends, at which we should not stop and which it befits us to use, not enjoy.[5] But of these neutral qualities, not all are equally useful or detrimental to those making their way towards Christ. Consequently they are to be adopted or rejected according to their importance. Knowledge is of more assistance to piety than beauty or physical strength or wealth. And although all learning can be referred to Christ, one type of learning leads to him more directly than another. It is from this point of view that you must measure the usefulness or lack of usefulness of all neutral matters. You love the study of letters. Good, if it is for the sake of Christ. If you love it only in order to have knowledge, then you come to a standstill at a point from which you should have gone on. But if you are interested in letters so that with their help you may more clearly discern Christ, hidden from our view in the mysteries of the Scriptures, and then, having discerned him, may love him, and by knowing and loving him, may communicate this knowledge and delight in it, then gird yourself for the study of letters. Yet do not allow it to go beyond what you think will be profitable to your virtuous intent. If you have confidence in yourself and hope for an immense reward in Christ, continue on your way like a bold merchant, ranging afar in the realms of pagan letters, and convert the riches of Egypt into the adornment of the Lord's temple. But if you fear a greater loss than gain, return to the first rule, know yourself, and measure yourself by your own standard. It is better to know less and love more than to know more and not love.

Therefore knowledge holds the first place among neutral things; then come good health, intellectual gifts, eloquence, beauty, strength, rank, influence, authority, prosperity, reputation, race, friends, and family possessions. These qualities are to be cultivated to the degree in which they contribute most directly to the acquisition of virtue, but only if they are available to us in our pursuit of virtue. Otherwise we should not be diverted from our goal because of them.

Suppose money comes your way; if it does not pose a hindrance to your good purpose, put it to good use; make friends for yourself of the mammon of iniquity.[6] But if you are afraid of losing your good purpose, despise filthy lucre, and in emulation of Crates the Theban hurl your troublesome burden into the sea,[7] rather than have it retard your progress toward Christ. You will be more disposed to do this if, as we have said, you accustom yourself not to admire any of those things that are extrinsic to you, that is, that do not pertain to the inner man. In this way you will not grow proud if these blessings should fall to your lot, nor will you suffer anguish if they should be denied or taken away, since Christ alone is the measure of your happiness. But if this should befall you without any efforts of your own, be all the more cautious, not self-assured, considering it as an occasion granted by God for the exercise of virtue, but one fraught with danger. If you are wary of fortune's generosity, imitate Prometheus. Do not accept the treacherous box,[8] but stripped and unencumbered, strive after the one and only good. Those who seek after money with immense anxiety as if it were something of great worth and make it the mainstay of their lives, who consider themselves happy if it is safe and sound and proclaim themselves miserable when it is gone, have fashioned a multitude of gods for themselves. You have made money the equal of Christ if it can render you happy or unhappy.

What I have said about money you may apply also to honours, pleasures, health, and even the life of the body. We should strive after Christ, our only goal, with such great ardour that we have no time to attend to any of these things, either when they are given to us or when they are taken away. For 'the time is short,' as the Apostle said. 'It remains that those who use this world should act as if they did not use it.'[9] I know that the world laughs at this attitude as if it were stupid and insane, but it was only through this stupidity that 'it pleased God to save those who believe,'[10] and 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men.'[11] Judge everything you do by this rule. If you exercise a trade, well and good, if you do so without fraud. But what is your goal? To support your family. But why do you have a family? That you may win it over to Christ. You are on the right track. You fast,[12] a pious action at least in appearance. But what is your design in fasting? To preserve your larder or to be regarded as more religious? Your eye is not sound. Or you fast in order not to fall ill. Why are you afraid of illness? That it may deprive you of pleasure? Your eye is diseased. You say that you wish to be in good health in order to have strength for your studies. But what is the purpose of your studies? To procure some priestly position? What is your motivation in seeking the priesthood? To live for yourself, not for Christ. You have departed from the standard which every Christian should have before his eyes. You take food in order to be healthy of body. If you wish to be healthy of body so that you may have sufficient strength for holy studies and holy vigils, then you have attained your goal. But if you take care of your health in order not to become less attractive and less capable of satisfying your lustful desires, then you have fallen away from Christ and fashioned another god for yourself.

There are those who honour certain saints with certain specific ceremonies.[13] One person greets Christopher each day, but only if he sees his image.[14] To what end? Evidently because he is convinced that thus he will be preserved from a violent death that day. Another worships a certain Rocco,[15] but why? Because he thinks that this saint will ward off the plague from his body. Another mumbles special little prayers to Barbara[16] or

George[17] to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy. Someone else fasts in honour of Apollonia so that he will not have toothaches.[18] Still another makes visits to statues of holy Job to escape the itch.[19] Some assign a certain portion of their profits to the poor so that their merchandise will not be lost in shipwreck. A candle is lit to Hiero for the recovery of lost goods.[20] In short, in this way we have appointed certain saints to preside over all the things we fear or desire. These differ with each nation, so that in France Paul has the same importance that Hiero has for us, while James and John are not equally powerful in all places. If this sort of piety is not turned from mere consideration of material advantages or disadvantages and redirected towards Christ, then far from being Christian it is not much removed from the superstition of those who pledged a tenth part of their substance to Hercules so that they might become rich[21] or a cock to Aesculapius in order to recover from some illness[22] or sacrificed a bull to Neptune for a safe crossing.[23] The names may have been changed, but the purpose remains the same.

You pray to God that you may not suffer a premature death rather than pray that he grant you a better frame of mind so that wherever death overtakes you it will not find you unprepared. You give no thought to amending your life, yet you ask God that you may not die. What is the object of your prayer? Obviously that you may go on sinning as long as possible. You pray for riches, but you do not know how to use them. Are you not praying for your own undoing? You pray for good health and you abuse it. Is not your piety really impiety? There will be objections at this point from certain petty religious who consider piety a source of gain[24] and, as the same Apostle said, 'by sweet and flattering words seduce the hearts of the simple-minded, serving their own appetites rather than Jesus Christ.'[25] 'Therefore,' they will say, 'do you forbid the veneration of the saints, in whom God is honoured?' I do not condemn those who do these things out of a naïve superstition so much as I do those who pursue them for their own gain. They glorify pious practices that are barely admissible as if they were the paragon of consummate piety, and they encourage for their own advantage the ignorance of the masses, which even I do not entirely condemn, but I will not allow them to lend great importance to things that are merely indifferent or consider matters of little value as being very important. I shall commend them for asking their patron Rocco to keep their lives from harm if they consecrate that life to Christ. I shall commend them the more if they pray for nothing else than an increase in their love of virtue with a corresponding hatred of vice. As for dying or living, let them leave that in God's hands and say with Paul: 'Whether we live or whether we die, we live and die for the Lord.'[26] True perfection will be attained if they 'desire to be dissolved and be with Christ,'[27] and if in sickness, financial setbacks, and all other misfortunes they consider it their glory and happiness to be deemed worthy even in this manner to conform to their Head.

Therefore it is not so reprehensible to act in this way as it is dangerous to stop there and put all your faith in these practices. I tolerate weakness, but with Paul 'I point out a more perfect way.'[28] If you examine all your actions and ambitions in accordance with this rule and never stop midway until you reach Christ, you will never stray from the true path and you will never do or tolerate anything in life that cannot be turned into an occasion for the practice of piety.

Fifth rule

Let us add a fifth rule, as a kind of reinforcement to the previous one, that you establish firmly in your mind that perfect piety is the attempt to progress always from visible things, which are usually imperfect or indifferent, to invisible, according to the division of man discussed earlier.[1] This precept is most pertinent to our discussion since it is through neglect or ignorance of it that most Christians are superstitious rather than pious, and except for the name of Christ differ hardly at all from superstitious pagans. Let us imagine, therefore, two worlds,[2] the one merely intelligible, the other visible. The intelligible, which may also be called the angelic, is the one in which God dwells with the blessed spirits, while the visible world comprises the celestial spheres and all that is contained therein. Then there is man, who constitutes, as it were, a third world, participating in the other two, in the visible world through the body, and in the invisible through the soul. Since we are but pilgrims in the visible world, we should never make it our fixed abode, but should relate by a fitting comparison everything that occurs to the senses either to the angelic world or, in more practical terms, to morals and to that part of man that corresponds to the angelic. What the visible sun is here in the visible world the divine mind is in the intelligible world and in that part of you related to it, namely, the spirit. What the moon is here is in that world the assembly of angels and blessed spirits, which they call the church triumphant, and in you it is the spirit. Whatever influence the upper world has over the earth, which lies beneath it, God exercises this same influence over your soul. The sun sets, rises, scorches, becomes temperate, quickens, produces, ripens, attracts, debilitates, cleanses, hardens, softens, illumines, brightens, gladdens. Therefore whatever you observe in it, or rather, whatever you observe in this material world, which is made up of elements, and which some have distinguished from the rest of the universe, and, lastly, whatever you see in the more material part of yourself, learn to refer to

God and to the invisible part of yourself. In that way, whatever offers itself to the senses will become for you an occasion for the practice of piety.

As it delights the bodily eye each time this visible sun spreads new light upon the earth, consider for a moment what must be the pleasure of the heavenly spirits, for whom that eternal sun ever rises and never sets; consider what great joy it is for a pure spirit, illumined by divine light. And in response to the promptings of visible creation pray in the words of Paul that 'he who commanded light to shine forth from darkness will begin to shine in your heart to illumine the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.'[3] Search out similar passages from the sacred books in which the grace of the divine Spirit is frequently compared to light. Night seems sad and gloomy to you; think of the soul deprived of divine light and shrouded in vice. And if you discern signs of night within yourself, pray that the sun of justice may rise upon you.[4]

Be so convinced of the existence of invisible things that those things that are seen become but mere shadows, which present to the eye only a faint image of invisible realities.[5] Moreover, whatever attracts or repels the senses in material things must be all the more intensely loved or hated by the spirit in the realm of the spirit. A handsome physical appearance is appealing to the eye. Imagine how fair must be the beauty of the soul! A misshapen face is unpleasant to look upon. Consider how odious is a mind defiled by vice. And similarly for the rest. For just as the soul has its own comeliness or deformity according as it pleases God or the devil, like rejoicing in like,[6] so it also has a youth of its own, old age, sickness, health, death, life, poverty, riches, pleasure, sorrow, war, peace, cold, heat, thirst, drink, hunger, and food. In a word, whatever we perceive in the body must be understood to exist also in the soul. Therefore the road to the spiritual and perfect life consists in gradually accustoming ourselves to be weaned from those things that do not really exist but appear partly to be what they are not, such as base pleasure or worldly honour, and are partly in a state of flux, hastening to return to nothing, and let ourselves be carried away to things that are real, eternal, unchangeable, and authentic. Socrates, a philosopher not so much in his words as in his life, was aware of this.[7] He said that the soul would migrate happily from the body only if it had previously meditated seriously upon death with the help of philosophy and had long become accustomed to be absent, as it were, from the body through contempt for material things and love and contemplation of spiritual things. The cross to which Christ has called us[8] and the death that Paul wishes us to die together with our Head[9] – echoing the words of the prophet: 'Since for your sake we are slain all the day long and accounted as sheep for the slaughter,'[10] and expressed by the Apostle in yet other terms: 'Seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth, have taste for the things that are above'[11] – all of this simply means that we should become numb to material things and render ourselves insensitive to them so that we may have more taste for things that pertain to the spirit as we have less taste for material things. Let us begin to live the interior life all the more sincerely as we live less exteriorly. To sum it all up in simple language, we should be less influenced by transitory things as we come to know more fully the things that are eternal, and we should have less esteem for insubstantial things as we begin to raise our thoughts to those that are real.

Therefore let this rule be ever in readiness, that we do not linger over temporal matters at any time, but move on, rising up to the love of spiritual things, which are incomparably better, despising visible things in comparison to those that are invisible. Illness of the body will be easier to bear if you consider it as a physic of the soul. You will be less solicitous about the health of the body if you concentrate your attention on guarding the health of the soul. Death of the body frightens you, but much more to be dreaded is the death of the soul. You shudder at visible poison, which is deadly to the body, but far more dreadful is the venom that destroys the soul. Hemlock is a poison for the body, but much more deadly is the venom of the soul, sensual pleasures. You are terrified and pale with fear that a lightning bolt, flashing out of the clouds, may strike you, yet how much more to be feared is the invisible lightning bolt of divine wrath: 'Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire'?[12] You are ravished by physical beauty; why do you show no passion for that beauty which does not manifest itself to the senses? Transfer your love to that beauty which is everlasting, heavenly, and incorruptible, and you will be more moderate in your love of the fleeting and fading beauty of the body. You pray that your field will receive rain, so that it will not dry up; pray rather that God will water your mind so that it will not become unproductive of virtue. With greatest care must you repair the bankruptcy of the soul. You make provisions for your old age so that nothing will be lacking to your body, and should you not take thought that nothing be lacking to the soul?

This is how we should act in the face of all those things that daily present themselves to our senses and variously influence them according to the diversity of their appearance, producing hope, fear, love, hatred, sorrow, and pleasure. The same rule applies for all literary works, which are made up of a literal sense and a mysterious sense, body and soul, as it were, in which you are to ignore the letter and look rather to the mystery. The writings of all the poets and the Platonist philosophers belong to this category, but especially the sacred Scriptures, which like those images of Silenus[13] mentioned by Alcibiades enclose unadulterated divinity under a lowly and almost ludicrous external appearance. Otherwise, if you were to read the account of creation without recourse to allegory – the formation of the figure of Adam from moist clay and the breathing into it of a soul, the creation of Eve from his rib, the prohibition to eat of the tree, the beguiling serpent, God strolling in the breeze, the guilty pair hiding themselves, the angel placed at the gate of paradise with a flaming sword that revolved in all directions to prevent their return into the garden, in a word, the whole story of creation[14] – if in all of this you were not to search beneath the surface, I do not see how it is any better than singing of the clay image fashioned by Prometheus,[15] the theft of fire by trickery, and the infusion of life into the clay by means of fire. As a matter of fact, if you read the poetic fable in an allegorical sense, it will be more profitable than the scriptural account if you do not penetrate the outer covering.

The myth of the giants[16] admonishes us that we must not do battle with the forces of heaven, or that we should refrain from those desires from which nature recoils and should set our minds on those things to which our nature is more inclined, provided they are morally acceptable. Thus, do not entangle yourself in marriage if celibacy is more suitable to your character, and conversely, do not vow yourself to celibacy if you seem more adapted to the married state, for whatever you attempt against your natural inclination[17] usually turns out to be unsuccessful. Circe's potions[18] teach us that pleasure is like a poison that makes men lose their minds and turns them from men into beasts. Tantalus,[19] tormented by thirst, teaches us that it is a great curse to gaze with open mouth at heaped up fortunes without venturing to make use of them. The boulder of Sisyphus[20] symbolizes the toils and troubles of ambition, and the labours of Hercules[21] remind us that heaven is won by noble exploits and untiring effort. Do you not learn in the form of a fable what philosophers and theologians, the preceptors of life, teach us?

If you read unallegorically of the infants struggling within the womb,[22] the right of primogeniture sold for a mess of pottage[23], the fraudulent seizing of a father's blessing ahead of time,[24] David's slaying of Goliath with a sling,[25] and the shaving off of Samson's locks,[26] then it is of no more importance than if you were to read the fiction of the poets. What difference is there whether you read the Book of Kings or the Book of Judges or Livy's history,[27] if in none of them you perceive the allegory? The latter work contains many things that could amend morals, but in the Bible there are some things that are even absurd at first glance and if understood only superficially can be prejudicial to morals. To cite a few examples:[28] David's acts of banditry, his adultery bought at the price of murder, Samson madly in love, the secret intercourse of Lot's daughters with their father, and a thousand other such stories. Therefore you must reject the carnal aspect of the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, and ferret out the spiritual sense. Manna will taste to you like that which you already have on your palate.

In bringing the mysteries to light you must not follow the conjectures of your own mind, but you must learn the method and the art, so to speak, which was handed down by a writer named Dionysius in his book *De divinis nominibus*[29] and by Augustine in his *De doctrina christiana*. It was the Apostle Paul who, after Christ, opened up certain sources of allegories. He was followed by Origen,[30] who is by far the predominant figure in this branch of theology. Theologians of the present day[31] either practically despise allegory or treat it very coolly. In the art of subtle distinction they are equal or even superior to ancient commentators, but in the treatment of this subject they cannot even compare with them, for two reasons, as far as I can determine. First, mystical exegesis cannot fail to fall flat if it is not seasoned with the powers of eloquence and a certain gracefulness of style, in which the ancients achieved an excellence that we cannot even approach. The second reason is that they are satisfied with Aristotle alone and banish the Platonists and Pythagoreans from the schools. But Augustine preferred the latter two,[32] not only because many of their ideas are perfectly consistent with our religion, but also because their figurative mode of expression, as I mentioned, and frequent use of allegory are very close to the language of Sacred Scripture. It is no wonder, then, that theological allegories were more suitably treated by those who could adorn and enrich arid and tedious subjects through their eloquent command of language, and who, by virtue of their wide learning in all aspects of antiquity, had long since practised in their study of the poets and philosophers the approach that was necessary for the interpretation of the Scriptures. It is their commentaries, therefore, that I wish you to peruse, since I am not training you for scholastic debate, but imparting moral principles.

But if you cannot grasp the mystery, remember none the less that it is there under the surface, and that it is preferable to have hope of understanding what is unknown than to be content with 'the letter that kills,'[33] and that is true not only of the Old Testament but also of the New. The gospel has its flesh and its spirit. Although the veil was lifted from Moses' face,[34] Paul still 'sees in a mirror obscurely,'[35] and Christ said in John's Gospel: 'The flesh is of no profit, it is the spirit that gives life.'[36] I would have had scruples to say: 'It is of no profit;' it would have been sufficient to say: 'It is of some profit, but the spirit is much more profitable.' But Truth itself said: 'It is of no profit.' Indeed it is of so little profit that according to Paul it is fatal unless it is referred to the spirit.[37] In another respect the flesh is useful in this sense, that it leads our weakness to the spirit by degrees. The body cannot subsist without the spirit, but the spirit has no need of the body. But if on the authority of Christ the spirit is so great that it alone gives life, then we must strive that in every written word and in all actions we regard the spirit, not the flesh. And if anyone will take note, he will find that this is the one thing to which Isaiah,[38] chief among the prophets, and Paul, chief among the apostles, call us. There is hardly a single Epistle in which Paul does not treat of this, does not inculcate in us that we must not put any trust in the flesh, and that in the spirit there is life, liberty, light, adoption, and those desirable fruits[39] that he enumerates. Everywhere he despises, condemns, and counsels us against the flesh. Be attentive and you will discover that all through the gospels our master, Jesus, teaches the same lesson. When he lifted the ass from the ditch,[40] gave sight to the blind man,[41] rubbed the ears of wheat together;[42] in his remarks about unwashed hands,[43] in his eating together with sinners,[44] in his parable about the Pharisee and the publican;[45] in matters of fasting,[46] in his reference to brothers according to the flesh,[47] the Jews' glorying that they were the sons of Abraham,[48] the offering of gifts before the altar;[49] in his teaching about prayer,[50] and his comments about the Pharisees' widening their phylacteries,[51] and in many other similar passages, he expresses contempt for the flesh and the superstition of those who preferred to be Jews in public rather than in secret. And when he said to the Samaritan woman: 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. But the hour is coming and now is at hand when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for it is such worshippers that the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.'[52] He signified the same thing in an external act when at the wedding he changed the water of the cold and insipid letter into the wine of the spirit,[53] which inebriates spiritual souls even to the point of despising life. And do not think it astonishing that Christ despised those practices that we mentioned above. He despised even more the eating of his own flesh and the drinking of his own blood if they were not eaten and drunk spiritually as well.[54] To whom do you think these words were addressed: 'The flesh is of no profit; it is the spirit that gives life'?[55] They were certainly not meant for those who think they are safe from all evil because they have a gospel or a copper cross hung around their neck, and think this is religious perfection, but for those to whom he revealed the sublime mystery of the eating of his body. If such a great sacrament is nothing, or is even harmful, how can we confide in any other carnal thing, if the spirit is not present?

Perhaps you celebrate the sacrifice of the mass daily, but you live for yourself and are not affected by the misfortunes of your neighbours. Then you are still in the 'flesh' of the sacrament. But if in offering sacrifice you are conscious of the meaning of that partaking, namely, that you are one spirit with the spirit of Christ, one body with the body of Christ, a living member of the church;[56] if you love nothing but in Christ, if you consider all your goods to be the common property of all men, if you are afflicted by the misfortunes of others as if they were your own, then you celebrate mass with great profit, since you do so spiritually. If you feel that you are somehow transfigured in Christ and live less and less for yourself, give thanks to the Spirit, who alone gives life. There are many who like to count how many times and on what days they assisted at mass,[57] and buoyed up by this as if it were a matter of great importance, leave the church as if they owed nothing more to Christ and return to their former way of life. I commend them for embracing the 'flesh' of piety, but I do not commend them for going no further.

Let what is represented there to the eyes be enacted within you. The death of the Head is represented. Examine yourself in your inmost heart,[58] as they say, to see how close you are to being dead to the world. If you are still subject to anger, ambition, greed, pleasure, and envy, even if you touch the altar, you are still far from the sacrifice. Christ was slain for you; offer these animals to him as sacrificial victims. Sacrifice yourself to him who once immolated himself for you to the Father. If you confide in him without reflecting on these things, God will hate your flabby and gross religion. You were baptized, but do not think that *ipso facto* you became a Christian. Your whole mentality still smacks exclusively of the world; outwardly you are a Christian, but in private you are more pagan than the pagans. Why is that so? Because you possess the body of the sacrament, but you are devoid of its spirit. What does it matter if the body has been washed when the soul remains defiled? What good is it that a few grains of salt have been put on your tongue if the soul remains unsalted? The body has been annointed, but the soul remains unannointed. But if you have been buried with Christ inwardly and are already to walk with him in newness of life,[59] then I recognize you as a Christian. What is the use of being sprinkled with a few drops of holy water as long as you do not wipe clean the inner defilement of the soul? You venerate the saints, and you take pleasure in touching their relics. But you disregard their greatest legacy, the example of a blameless life. No devotion is more pleasing to Mary than the imitation of Mary's humility.[60] No devotion is more acceptable and proper to the saints than striving to imitate their virtues. Would you like to win the favour of Peter and Paul? Imitate the faith of the one and the charity of the other, and you will accomplish more than if you were to dash off to Rome ten times. Would you like to pay the greatest homage to Francis? You are arrogant, you are a worshipper of money, you are quarrelsome. Make this gift to the saint: control your feelings and be more modest after the example of Francis; despise sordid gain and covet the goods of the mind. Abandon your contentiousness and conquer evil with good.[61] That saint will value this honour more than if you were to light a hundred candles before his shrine. Do you think it is important if you are transported to the grave with your head wrapped in the cowl of Francis?[62] Likeness of habit will be of no profit to you when you are dead if your morals were unlike his in life. And although the model of all piety is readily found in Christ, nevertheless, if you take great delight in worshipping Christ in his saints, then make sure you imitate Christ in his saints and in honour of each saint eradicate one vice or strive to attain a particular virtue. If this is the fruit of your devotion, I shall not be averse to these external manifestations.

With great veneration you revere the ashes of Paul, which I do not condemn, if your religion is consistent with your devotion.[63] If you venerate mute and dead ashes and ignore his living image still speaking and breathing, as it were, in his writings, is not your religion utterly absurd? You worship the bones of Paul preserved in a relic casket, but do not worship the mind of Paul hidden away in his writings? You make much of a piece of his body visible through a glass covering, and you do not marvel at the whole mind of Paul shining through his writings? You worship ashes, which are sometimes of some efficacy in removing bodily imperfections; why do you not honour the written word more, by which vices of the soul are healed? Let those without faith to whom these miracles have been accorded express their wonder, but you as a man of faith, embrace his writings, so that with the firm belief that God can do all things you may learn to love him above all else. You give homage to an image of Christ's countenance represented in stone or wood or depicted in colour. With how much more religious feeling should you render homage to the image of his mind, which has been reproduced in the Gospels through the artistry of the Holy Spirit. No Apelles[64] has ever portrayed with his brush the shape and features of the body in the way that speech reveals each person's mind and thought. This is especially so with Christ, for as he was the essence of simplicity and truth, there could be no dissimilarity between the archetype of the divine mind and the form of speech that issued from it. Just as nothing is more like the Father than the Son, the Word of the Father emanating from the innermost recesses of his spirit,[65] so nothing is more like Christ than the word of Christ uttered in the innermost sanctuary of his most holy mind. And you do not gaze with wonder upon this image, do not worship it, scan it with reverent eyes, treasure it in your mind? With such holy and efficacious relics of the Lord at your disposal, do you disregard them and seek out much more extraneous ones? You gaze with awe at what is purported to be the tunic or shroud of

Christ,[66] and you read the oracles of Christ apathetically? You think it an immense privilege to have a tiny particle of the cross in your home. But that is nothing compared to carrying about in your heart the mystery of the cross. If such things constitute religion, who could be more religious than the Jews? Even the most impious among them saw Jesus living in the flesh with their own eyes, heard him with their own ears and touched him with their own hands. Who is more fortunate than Judas, who pressed his lips upon the divine mouth? So true is it that the flesh is useless without the spirit that it would have been of no use even to the Virgin Mary to have borne Christ of her own flesh if she had not also conceived his spirit through the Holy Spirit.[67] This is a very great proof, but here is greater still.

As long as the apostles enjoyed the physical company of Christ, do you not read how weak they were and how crass was their understanding? Who could desire anything more to assure his complete salvation than this continuous familiarity between God and man? And yet after the performance of so many miracles, after they had been exposed for so many years to the teaching that proceeded from the mouth of God, after so many proofs of his resurrection, did he not upbraid them for their incredulity at the very last hour as he was about to be received into heaven?[68] What reason can be adduced for this? It was the flesh of Christ that stood in the way, and that is what prompted him to say: 'If I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come. It is expedient for you that I go.'[69] If the physical presence of Christ is of no profit for salvation, shall we dare to place our hopes for the attainment of perfect piety in any material thing? Paul had seen Christ in the flesh. What greater thing can be imagined? But he makes little of that, saying: 'Even if we knew Christ in human terms, we no longer know him in that way.'[70] Why did he not know him? Because he had advanced to a higher state of grace.[71]

Perhaps this discussion is becoming more verbose than is fitting for one who is merely passing on rules. But I am taking great pains for very good reason, because I have found out from experience that this error is the common plague of all Christianity and is all the more insidious because in appearance it bears a great resemblance to piety. There are no vices more dangerous than those which simulate virtue. For aside from the fact that it is easy even for the good to slip into these excesses, they are among the most difficult to correct because the untutored masses think it is a profanation of religion to criticize such things.

Immediately the world will protest and certain blustering preachers will emit their barkings, since they gladly sing their own tunes,[72] that is, they look to their own profit, not to Christ. In response to their ignorant superstition or feigned piety I must insist once more that I do not disapprove in any way of the external ceremonies of Christians and the devotions of the simple-minded, especially those that have been approved by the authority of the church, for they are often signs or supports of piety. Since they are almost a necessity for infants in Christ until they grow up and arrive at complete manhood,[73] they should not be scorned by those who have achieved manhood, lest the weak suffer hurt from bad example. I approve of what you do as long as your purpose is not vitiated and you do not consider as a fixed goal a stage from which you must make further progress towards salvation. But to worship Christ[74] through visible things for the sake of visible things and to think of this as the summit of religious perfection; to be complacent with oneself and to condemn others on this basis; to become transfixed by them and die there and, to put it succinctly, to be alienated from Christ by those very things that should be employed to lead us to him – this would be to desert the law of the gospel, which is spiritual, and to sink into a kind of Judaism, which perhaps is no less grave a peril than if, free of these superstitions, one struggled against great and overt vices of the soul. This disease may be more deadly. Granted, but the other is more uncurable.

How hard Paul, that incomparable defender of the spirit, had to toil in all his travels to woo the Jews away from their faith in works and spur them on to spiritual things![75] And yet I see that the common run of Christianity has reverted to this again. Did I say common run? That would be tolerable, if this aberration had not taken hold of a good part of priests and theologians and practically all of their followers, who in name and manner of living profess the spiritual life. If the salt has lost its savour, what will the others be salted with?[76] I am ashamed to mention with what superstition so many of them observe silly little ceremonies, instituted by mere men, but certainly not with this purpose in mind. With what spite they exact these same ceremonies of others, with what a sense of security they trust in them, with what temerity they judge others, with what jealous rivalry they defend them! They think heaven is owed to them because of these actions of theirs, and once they become hardened in these practices they fancy themselves Paul or Antony returned to life.[77] They begin to censure the lives of others with great superciliousness in accordance with that rule of the unwise, as the comic poet said, 'esteeming nothing right save what they do themselves.'[78] But when they have grown old in their way of life, you will see that they still have not acquired any of the qualities of Christ. Rather, they are like animals, steeped in certain repulsive vices, difficult to get along with in their communal life and barely putting up with themselves, frigid in charity, ardent in their anger, unrelenting in their hatred, venomous in their speech, invincible in kindling animosity. They are ready to fight to the death for matters of the least importance and so removed are they from the perfection of Christ that they do not even possess the common virtues that the pagans acquire either through natural reason or the experiences of life or the precepts of philosophers. They are unruly, intractable, quarrelsome, avid for pleasure, nauseated by the divine word, agreeable to no one, suspicious of others, and indulgent to themselves.

Is this the result of so many years of toil, that you are the worst element of mankind and think you are the best? Instead of being a Christian you are a Jew, slave to empty observances, so that you may receive praise not in secret with God, but in public before men? But if you walked in the spirit,[79] not in the flesh, where are the fruits of the Spirit?[80] Where is charity, where is that joy of the mind? Where is peace toward all men? Where is patience, long-suffering, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity? Where is the image of Christ in your morals? You say: 'I am not a whore-monger, not a thief, not guilty of sacrilege, and I observe what I have professed.' What does this recall but those words: 'I am not like other men, robbers, and adulterers, and I fast twice a week'?[81] I prefer, yes, I prefer the humble publican who implored mercy to this kind of just man enumerating his own good deeds. What did you profess, that you would *not* do what you swore to in baptism, namely, to be a Christian, that is spiritual, and not a Jew? Thus it would seem, since for the sake of petty traditions invented by men you transgress the commandments of God. Or is Christianity not the spiritual life? Listen to Paul speaking to the Romans: 'There is therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus who do not walk according to the flesh. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has liberated me from the law of sin and death. God has done what the law, which was weak because of the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the justification of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit. For those who live according to the flesh are wise in the things of the flesh, but those in the spirit sense the things of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death, whereas the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace. For the wisdom of the flesh is inimical to God; it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.'[82] What could be said more fully or more plainly?

But men who are skilful at indulging their own vices and quick to criticize the vices of others do not think that this has anything to do with them. What Paul said about walking in the flesh they apply only to adulterers and whore-mongers and they contort his words about the wisdom of the flesh, which is inimical to God, applying them against those who have learnt 'secular' literature as they call it. They congratulate themselves on both counts, that they are not adulterers and that they are egregiously ignorant of all literature. But as for living in the spirit, they imagine it to be exactly what they are doing. If they had examined Paul's language with as much care as they devote to vilifying the language of Cicero,[83] they would no doubt understand that the Apostle calls 'flesh' that which is visible, and 'spirit' that which is invisible. He teaches in all his writings that the visible must be subordinate to the visible, not, contrariwise, the invisible to the visible. You in the reverse manner adapt Christ to these things whereas they should be related to Christ. Or do you demand proof that the word 'flesh' does not pertain solely to lust and sensuality? Listen to what the Apostle says to the Colossians, treating this same subject, as always: 'Let no one lead you astray, affecting humility and the religion of the angels, resorting to things he has not seen, foolishly puffed up in the knowledge of the flesh and not holding fast to the Head (that is, Christ) through which the whole body, nourished and held together through joints and ligaments, increases in divine growth.'[84]

And to remove any doubt you may have that he is speaking of those who rely on certain external ceremonies and clamour against the spiritual pursuits of others, pay heed to the following statement: 'If you are dead with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you conduct yourself as if you lived in the world?'[85] Turning us aside from these things, he says a little further on: 'Therefore, if you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on those upon the earth.'[86] Then, when he transmits his teaching concerning the spiritual life, what precaution does he give? Surely not that we should make use of this or that ceremony, that we should dress in a certain fashion, that we should follow such and such a diet, that we should run through a certain number of psalms? No, none of these. What then? He said: 'Mortify what is earthly in you, fornication, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is an idolatry';[87] and a little further on: 'From now on you also cast these all aside – anger, resentment, and malice';[88] and just after that: 'Taking off the old man with his ways of acting and putting on the new, the one who is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of the one who created him.'[89] Who is the old man, then? Obviously the earthly Adam,[90] issued from the earth, whose dwelling is upon the earth, not in heaven. By earth you should understand whatever is visible and therefore transitory. Who is the new man? Obviously the heavenly one who came from heaven.[91] Understand by heaven whatever is invisible and therefore eternal. Lastly, to make sure that we do not attempt to win God's favour like the Jews through certain observances as if they were magic rites he teaches us that our actions will be pleasing to God only in so far as they are related to charity, whence they originated. 'Above all else' he says, 'have charity, which is the bond of perfection, and let the peace of Christ exult in your hearts, in which you were also called in one body.'[92] I shall give you a clearer proof. Writing to the Galatians, he uses the terms 'flesh' and 'spirit' frequently, not only exhorting them to abandon lust and embrace chastity, but also trying to draw them away from Judaism and reliance on deeds, into which they had been led by false apostles. In this passage, in which he reviews the works of the flesh, notice which vices he mentions: 'The works of the flesh are evident: they are fornication, impurity, immorality, cult of idols, poisonings, enmities, rivalries, jealousies, fits of anger, quarrelings, dissensions, factions, envy, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and the like.'[93] And a little further on: 'If we live in the spirit, let us walk in the spirit.'[94] Then as if signalling the disease that is fatal to the spirit he adds: 'Let us not become eager for vainglory, challenging one another and envying one another.'[95]

A tree is known by its fruit.[96] It does not matter to me that you do not neglect vigils, fasts, silence, little prayers, and all other such observances. I shall not believe that you are in the spirit until I see the fruits of the spirit. Why should I not insist that you are still in the flesh when after you have practised these observances almost all your life, I still detect in you the works of the flesh: jealousy worse than you would find in a woman, a military proneness to anger and violence, an insatiable passion for quarrelling, unbridled invective, a malicious tongue as venomous as a viper's, pompous haughtiness, inflexible obstinacy, slippery loyalty, vanity, pretence, and flattery? You judge your brother in meat or drink or dress. But Paul judges you from your deeds.

Or perhaps what distinguishes you from worldly men dedicated to the flesh is the fact that you are subject to the same vices but in less grave circumstances. Which is worse, that a man give in to feelings of anger, enmity, and jealousy because of a stolen birthright, the rape of his daughter, an injury done to his parents, or to obtain public office or the prince's favour, or that you (I am ashamed to say it) do all these things with much more brutality for no reason at all? A lesser reason for committing sin does not diminish guilt, but aggravates it. The magnitude of the sin does not matter so much as the degree of passion involved. On the contrary the lesser the reason for deviating from correct conduct the more criminal is the wrong-doer. I am not talking now about those monks whose morals even the world detests, but of those whom the common people admire not as men but as angels. But those same monks should not be offended by my words, which are directed at vices, not men. If they are good-living men, they should be glad to be reminded by anyone, whoever he may be, of things that pertain to salvation. It is no secret to me that there are many among them who, aided by their literary studies and gifts of intelligence, have had some experience of the mysteries of the spirit. But, as Livy[97] said, 'it is often the case that the greater part overcomes the better.' But if we be allowed to admit the truth, do we not see that those monks who live the strictest lives place the highest religious perfection in ceremonies or a fixed recitation of the psalms or manual labour? But if anyone were to examine and question them about spiritual things, he would find very few who do not walk in the flesh. And from this derives this great weakness of souls, which tremble with fear where there is nothing to be afraid of and yawn with weariness where the danger is greatest. This is the reason, too, for that perpetual infancy in Christ, not to use stronger language, by which, giving reverse values to things, we ascribe great importance to that which is worthless and disregard the only thing that is important. We are always acting under a tutor's instruction, always under the yoke, never aspiring to the liberty of the spirit, never growing into the fulness of charity, despite what Paul cries out to the Galatians: 'Stand firm, and do not submit yourselves again to the yoke of slavery,'[98] and in another passage: 'Therefore the law was our tutor until Christ came, so that we might win justification by faith. But since faith came, we are no longer under the tutor. For you are all sons of God by faith, which is in Christ Jesus,'[99] and a little further on: 'So with us, when we were small, we were slaves to the elements of the world. But when the fulness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that he might redeem those who were under the law, and that we might receive adoption as sons. And since you are sons of God, God sent the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father." Therefore he is no longer a slave,[100] but a son.'[101] Again in another place: 'For you were called to freedom, brethren, save that you are not to use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through the charity of the spirit to serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.'[102] Again to the Romans: 'For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall again into fear, but the spirit that makes you sons of God by adoption, through which we cry "Abba, Father."'[103] The same matter is dealt with in the Epistle to Timothy: 'Train yourself in piety. For while bodily exercise is of limited usefulness, piety is useful in everything.'[104] And to the Corinthians: 'The Lord is spirit. Where the spirit is, there is liberty.'[105]

But why should we refer to one passage or another? Paul's whole purpose is simply this: that the flesh be despised as it is a source of contention, and that he establish us in the spirit, the source of charity and liberty. For the flesh, slavery, disquiet, and contention are inseparable companions, as are the spirit, peace, love, and liberty. The Apostle drives this message home over and over again. Are we to look for a better teacher of religion than he? This was the greatest commandment in the Mosaic law,[106] and this is what Christ repeats and perfects in the gospel. For this reason above all he was born and died, to teach us not to act like Jews, but to love. After the Last Supper, with what anxiety and emotion he orders his apostles not to observe prescriptions about food and drink but about mutual charity![107] What else does John, fellow initiate in Christ's mysteries,[108] teach, or rather demand, but that we love one another?[109] While Paul commends charity throughout the Epistles, as I said, in writing to the Corinthians he puts charity before miracles and prophecy and the tongues of angels.[110]

Do not tell me now that charity consists in being an assiduous churchgoer, prostrating yourself before the statues of the saints, lighting candles, and repeating a certain number of prayers. God has no need of this. This is what Paul calls charity: to edify our neighbour,[111] to consider everyone as members of the same body, to regard everyone as one in Christ, to rejoice in the Lord at your brother's prosperity as if it were your own[112] and to heal his misfortunes as if they were your own.[113] It is to correct the erring gently, teach the ignorant, lift up the fallen, console the downhearted, aid the struggler, support the needy,[114] in a word, devote all your resources, all your zeal, all your care to this one end, that you benefit as many as you can in Christ. Just as he was not born for himself and did not live for himself or die for himself, but dedicated himself entirely to our needs, so let us also devote ourselves to the interests of our brethren, not to our own. If this were to be done, there would be nothing happier or more effortless than the religious life, which now on the contrary we observe to be joyless and toilsome, full of Jewish superstitions, and not free of any of the vices of the laity, while in some it is even more contaminated. If Augustine, whom most of them vaunt as the founder of their way of life,[115] were now to come back to life, he would not even recognize this breed of men. He would cry out that nothing could have been further from his mind than this type of life, and that he had instituted a rule of life not modelled after the superstition of the Jews but after the example of the apostles.

But for some time now I have heard this rejoinder from certain more sensible individuals: 'One must be vigilant in the smallest things lest he sink little by little into greater vices.' I agree, but you must be no less vigilant that you do not become so stuck in small things that you isolate yourself altogether from things of great importance. In the first instance the peril is more evident, in the second it is more serious. Flee Scylla in such a way that you do not fall victim to Charybdis. It is salutary to be faithful in small things, but it is fatal to put your trust in them. Paul does not forbid you to use the elements of this world,[116] but does not wish that one who is free in Christ should be a slave of these elements. He does not condemn the law of works if one puts them to legitimate use.[117] Without these, perhaps, you will not be a pious Christian, but they do not make you pious. They will lead to piety if you use them to this extent, but if you begin to derive pleasure from them, they extinguish piety once and for all. The Apostle makes little of the works of Abraham,[118] which everyone will admit were extraordinary, and you have confidence in yours? God is opposed to sacrificial victims and sabbaths and the new moons of his people, although he was the author of all these things. Will you be so bold as to compare your petty observances with the precepts of divine law? Listen to God's nausea and disgust with such things: 'What is the multitude of your sacrificial victims to me? I am sated. I do not want holocausts of rams or the fat of fatted beasts or the blood of bullocks and lambs and goats. When you come before my sight, who asked this of your hands, that you trample over my courts? Do not offer any more vain sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to me. I shall not tolerate the feast of the new moon[119] and the sabbath and other festivities. Your assemblies are iniquitous. My soul hates your new moons and your solemnities. They have become burdensome to me. I have become weary of putting up with them. And when you extend your hands, I shall turn away my eyes from you, and when you multiply your prayers, I shall not hear you.'[120] When he mentions observances and sacred rites and multiplied prayers, does he not single out with his finger, as it were, those who measure religion by the number of psalms or prayers recited? Notice too how marvellously the eloquent prophet expresses God's aversion for ceremonies, saying that he could no longer tolerate them with his eyes or his ears. What ceremonies, I pray you? Why, those very ones that God himself handed down to be preserved so scrupulously and that were observed with such devotion for so many centuries by holy kings and prophets. And these he detests when mankind was still under the law of the flesh: will you, living under the law of the spirit, put trust in these petty observances that originated in your own mind?

In another passage God commands the same prophet to proclaim the same message and to lift up his voice unceasingly like a trumpet.[121] Obviously it was a serious matter, worthy of stern rebuke, and one that could not be obtained from them except by great effort. He says: 'They seek me from day to day and they wish to know my ways, as if they were a people that did justice and did not forsake the judgment of their God. They ask me for just judgments and wish to draw near to their God. "Why have we fasted, and you have not seen it, and humbled ourselves, and you did not know of it?" Behold on the day of your fasting you pursue your own interests, and you seek out all your debtors. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and fight, and you strike with your fist sacrilegiously. Do not fast as you have done up to this day, so that your cry will be heard on high. Is this the fast I chose, that a man should torment his soul? Is it to twist his head like a hoop and prepare a bed of sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call fasting and a day acceptable to the Lord?'[122] But what shall we say of this? Does God condemn what he himself had commanded? Not at all. What, then? What he detests is that one remain in the flesh of the law, and trust in something of no worth. Moreover, in both passages he points out the result he wishes to obtain. 'Wash yourselves,' he says; 'be purified; remove the evil of your thoughts from before my eyes.'[123] When you hear him speak of the evil of thoughts, has he not plainly indicated the spirit and the interior man? The eyes of the Lord do not see what is manifested externally, but what is in secret. He does not judge according to what the eyes see, nor does he make accusation according to what the ears hear.[124] He does not know the foolish virgins,[125] outwardly adorned, but barren within. He does not know those who say with their lips: 'Lord, Lord.'[126] Then Isaiah admonishes that the practice of the spiritual life does not consist in ceremonies but in love of one's neighbour. 'Seek justice, aid the oppressed, plead for the fatherless, defend the widow.'[127] In another place he added a similar exhortation regarding fasting: 'Is not this rather the fast that I chose? to loose the bonds of wickedness, undo the thongs of the yoke, free those who were oppressed and burst their bonds asunder, share your bread with the hungry and bring the poor and the homeless into your house. When you see someone naked, cover him, and do not despise your own flesh.'[128]

What, then, will the Christian do? Shall he neglect the precepts of the church? Shall he despise the honourable traditions of his ancestors? Shall he condemn pious customs? On the contrary, if he is weak, he will preserve them as necessary to him, but if he is strong and mature, he will observe them all the more lest through his superior knowledge he offend his weak brother and bring about the spiritual ruin of one for whom Christ died.[129]

It is right not to omit these observances, but it is necessary to perform those others.[130] Corporal works are not condemned, but those that are invisible are preferred. Visible worship is not condemned, but God is appeased only by invisible piety. God is spirit,[131] and he is moved by spiritual sacrifices. It would be shameful that Christians do not know what a certain pagan poet did not fail to recognize: 'If God is spirit, as poets say / With purest mind must he be worshipped.'[132] Let us not belittle the author because he is a pagan or a rather unimportant writer. This saying is worthy of a great theologian, and, as I have discovered, as little understood as it is read. The meaning is that like is affected by like.[133] You believe that God is greatly moved by the slaying of a bull or by the odour of incense, as if he were a body. He is mind, the purest and the simplest of minds. Therefore he must be worshipped above all with a pure mind. You think that the burning of wax is a sacrifice. But David said: 'A contrite spirit is a sacrifice to God.'[134] And if he despised the blood of goats or of bullocks,[135] he will not despise a contrite and humbled heart. If you do what is valued in the eyes of men, apply yourself even more to do what the eyes of God require. The body may be covered with a monk's cowl, but what good is that if the mind wears a worldly garb?[136] If the outer man is clad in a white tunic, let the garments of the inner man be as white as snow.[137] You observe exterior silence; take much more care that your mind is free within. In a visible place of worship you kneel on bodily knees; but nothing is accomplished thereby if in the shrine of the heart you stand erect in defiance of God. You venerate the wood of the cross; better to follow the mystery of the cross. You observe fasts and abstain from things that do not defile a man,[138] and you do not refrain from obscene speech which defiles both your own and another's conscience. Food is denied to the body, and the soul is gorged with swine's husks.[139] You adorn a stone building, and you have places sacred to religion; of what use is it if the temple of the heart, whose wall Ezekiel's vision penetrated,[140] has been profaned by the abominations of Egypt? You keep the sabbath externally, and within everything resounds with the tumult of vice. The body does not commit adultery, but by your cupidity your mind is adulterous. You sing psalms with the bodily tongue, but listen to what your mind says within. You bless with the mouth and curse with the heart.[141] Physically you are confined to a narrow cell, but in your thoughts you wander over the whole world. You hear the word of God with your bodily ears; listen rather within. What does the prophet say? 'Unless you hear within, your soul will weep.'[142] What do you read in the gospel? 'So that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not hear.'[143] And again the prophet: 'You will hear with your ears, but you will not understand.'[144] Blessed, therefore, are they who hear the word of God within. Happy those to whom the Lord speaks inwardly, and their souls will be saved. It is this inward ear that David bids the daughter of the king to incline, she who was bedecked within her chamber with gold-embroidered robes.[145]

In a word, what good is it not to do the evils that you lust after in your desires? What good is it to do good exteriorly if interiorly one's thoughts are quite the opposite? Is it any great feat to visit Jerusalem bodily when within you there is Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon? There is no great merit in treading where Christ trod with human footsteps, but it is a great thing to follow in the steps of Christ in the affections of the mind. If it is a great achievement to have touched the Lord's sepulchre, will it not be just as meritorious to have reproduced the mystery of his burial? You confess your sins to a priest, who is a mere man; take care how you confess them to God.[146] For to confess them inwardly to him is to have hatred for them. Perhaps you believe that your imperfections are washed away once and for all by wax seals[147] or a paltry sum of money or some brief pilgrimage. You are all wrong. The wound was inflicted within you, and it is within that the remedy must be applied. Your affections have been corrupted; you loved what was worthy of hate, you hated what should have been loved. The sweet was bitter to you, and the bitter sweet.[148] I am not concerned with what you manifest externally. But if by a complete reversal you begin to hate what you once loved, to flee from it and shudder at it, if what once tasted like gall becomes sweet to your affections, then I regard this as proof of your return to good health. Mary Magdalene loved much; hence many sins were forgiven her.[149] The more you love Christ, the more you will hate your vices; for hatred of sin follows upon the love of piety as the shadow follows the body. I prefer that you hate your vicious habits once and for all, truly and from within, than that you detest them ten times verbally before a priest.

Therefore, as I have illustrated in a few examples, in the whole theatre of this visible world, in the old law, in the new, in all the teaching of the church, and finally in yourself and in every human activity there is externally something we can call the flesh, and internally there is the spirit. In all of which, if we do not reverse the order of things, if we put only such confidence in visible things as they contribute to things of more importance, and look only to the spirit and to those things that pertain to charity, we will end up not gloomy and weak, like those who remain always children (as the proverb has it), brutish, dry bones, as the prophet says,[150] lifeless, lethargic, stupid, quarrelsome, envious, and maligners. Rather we shall be high-minded in Christ, of abundant charity, strong and constant in good or bad fortune, closing our eyes to petty things, striving towards higher things, full of enthusiasm, full of knowledge, that knowledge the repudiators of which are in turn repudiated by the Master of all learning. For it is ignorance, usually accompanied by indocility and what the Greeks wisely call self-love (*φιλαυτία*),[151] which alone brings it about, as the prophet says, that 'we rely on things of no value and speak falsities, conceive trouble and bring forth iniquity,'[152] and submit ourselves with fear and abjection to Jewish ceremonies. Of such people Paul says: 'I bear witness to them that they have a zeal for God, but it is without wisdom.'[153] What were they ignorant of? Obviously that the end of the law is Christ.[154] Christ is spirit;[155] he is love.[156] Isaiah describes more openly the wretched and futile slavery of those who live in the flesh: 'For this reason my people were led away captive, that they had no wisdom. And their noblemen perished of hunger, and their multitude was parched with thirst.'[157] It is no wonder that the people are the slaves of the elements of this world,[158] that is to say, the untutored masses, who know nothing save what they learn from others. More astonishing is the fact that those among the highest ranks of the Christian religion perish of hunger and are parched with thirst in the same captivity. Why do they perish of hunger? Because they did not learn from Christ to break barley loaves.[159] They lick only the rough husk without extracting the kernel. Why are they parched with thirst? Because they did not learn from Moses to make the water spring from the spiritual rock.[160] Nor did they drink of 'the streams of living water that flow from the belly of Christ. This was said of the spirit,'[161] not of the flesh.

Therefore, my brother, do not progress slowly by dint of reluctant effort, but by moderate exercise arrive at quick and vigorous adulthood in Christ. Embrace zealously this rule, not to be willing to crawl along the ground with unclean animals, but supported on those wings whose growth Plato thinks are induced in our minds by the heat of love and shoot out anew,[162] raise yourself as on the steps of Jacob's ladder[163] from the body to the spirit, from the visible to the invisible, from the letter to the mystery, from sensible things to intelligible things, from composite things to simple things. In this way, the Lord will draw nigh in his turn to the one who draws nigh to him,[164] and if you will attempt to the limit of your powers to rise out of your moral darkness and the tumult of the senses, he will obligingly come forth to meet you from his inaccessible light[165] and that unimagined silence,[166] in which not only all the tumult of the senses, but also the forms of all intelligible things fall silent.

Sixth rule

And since as one writes extemporaneously one thought gives rise to another, I shall add a sixth rule related in some way to those that preceded, as necessary to everyone for salvation as it is a matter of concern to but a few. It is that the mind of one who aspires after Christ should be in complete disaccord with the actions and opinions of the crowd and his model of piety should be Christ alone and no other. For he is the sole archetype, and whoever departs from it even in the slightest[1] deviates from what is right and runs outside the true path. In a similar vein Plato in his *Republic* with great earnestness, as is his wont, says that whoever has not imbued his mind with firm ideas about good and evil cannot remain steadfast in the preservation of virtue.[2] But how much more dangerous it is to entertain false opinions deep within our minds concerning those things that pertain to salvation! For that reason Plato is of the opinion that the matter of greatest concern is that the guardians, who must be free of all wrongdoing, must engrave in their minds as inviolable laws lofty and unwavering principles concerning what is to be sought after or avoided.[3] For whatever one is firmly convinced of is expressed in his moral conduct. Therefore it should be the chief care of Christians that from the cradle onwards, amidst the blandishments of nurses and the kisses of parents, under the tutelage of their teachers, children should imbibe convictions worthy of Christ, because nothing sinks more deeply into the mind or adheres to it more tenaciously than that which is instilled in it in early years, as Quintilian says.[4] Far, far from the tiny ears of infants those vulgar love songs, bawdier than the pagan populace ever allowed, that Christians hum at home and in the streets! Do not let them hear their dear mother bewailing some material loss or proclaiming her misery and desolation when her sister has died. Do not let them hear their father upbraiding someone's cowardice for not having vindicated a wrong with interest or expressing his admiration for those who have amassed a huge fortune by fair means or foul. Man's mind seizes immediately upon bad example just as naphtha is ignited if it is placed close to fire. Yet there is no time of life when this rule should not be put into practice so that all vulgar errors may be pulled out of the mind by the roots and salutary opinions be put in their place and so reinforced that nothing will be able to dislodge them.

Whoever does this will follow after virtue of his own accord with no difficulty and will judge those who act otherwise as worthy of pity, not imitation. Such was the meaning of Socrates' saying – criticized by Aristotle,[5] but not at all to be deemed absurd – that virtue is simply the knowledge of what is to be sought after and what avoided.[6] Not that he did not see the distinction between the knowledge and the love of good, but as Demosthenes answered that in public speaking delivery was first, second, and third in importance,[7] meaning that it was so essential that it was the whole of oratory, so Socrates in his discussion with Protagoras proves that knowledge has so great an importance in all virtue that sins arise solely from false opinions. In reality both he who loves Christ and he who loves pleasure, money, and false honour pursue the good and the beautiful, since each finds pleasure in what he does.[8] But the latter err through ignorance, embracing as sweet that which is most bitter, shunning as bitter that which is sweetest of all. In the same way they pursue what is pure loss, mistaking it for something good and profitable, fear as loss that which is unique gain,[9] esteem as beautiful that which is ugly, and consider shameful that which alone brings glory. Furthermore, if one is thoroughly convinced and has assimilated into the very substance of his soul that virtue alone is best, most pleasing, most beautiful, most honourable, and most useful, and that on the contrary immorality alone is evil, foul torment, shameful, and ruinous, and if he comes to this conclusion not because of popular opinion but through the very nature of things, then it is impossible that with these firm convictions he can remain very long in the grip of wickedness.

The common crowd has long been a poor model of life or judgment. And things have never gone so well in human affairs that the worst has not attracted the greatest numbers. Beware of this type of reasoning: 'Everyone does it; my forbears set out on this path; such and such famous philosopher or theologian is of this opionion. That's the way the mighty live; this has been the practice of kings; bishops and pontiffs do this all the time.' These are certainly not the crowd. But do not be influenced by big names. I do not measure the crowd by social rank, but by mentality. The crowd are those in Plato's cave,[10] who, chained by their own passions, marvel at the empty images of things as if they were true reality. Would it not be preposterous to try to fit the rule to the stone rather than the stone to the rule?[11] Would it not be even more absurd if instead of trying to adapt men's morals to Christ one should adapt Christ to men's lives? Do not think something is right because the ruling class or the majority do it. The only right conduct is that which conforms to the rule of Christ. Indeed the very fact that something pleases the majority should make it suspect to you. Those who take to heart Christian simplicity, poverty, and truth are but a tiny flock,[12] and they always will be. It is tiny, but blessed, since to it alone is owed the kingdom of heaven. The path of virtue is narrow and trodden by very few,[13] but no other leads to life. Does a wise builder take his model from a very ordinary work or from the best? Painters hold up the best paintings to themselves as models. Our example is Christ, in whom alone are all the patterns of the holy life. You may imitate him without any exception. From men of tried virtue you may take single qualities as a model according as they correspond to the archetype of Christ. But as for the mass of Christians, consider that nothing more corrupt ever existed, not even among the pagans, as far as opinions about morals are concerned.

But with regard to their sentiments about matters of faith, let them think as they will. One thing is certain beyond the shadow of a doubt, and that is that faith without morals worthy of faith is of such little worth that it even contributes to one's damnation.[14] Read through the annals of the ancients and compare them with contemporary morals. When was true uprightness of life more despised? When were riches, whatever their source, held in more esteem? Of what age was that saying of Horace more true: 'A dowried wife, a bank account, and friends, / Beauty and birth Dame Wealth bestows'?[15] And another saying of his: 'Race and virtue without cash / Aren't worth a blade of grass.'[16] Who does not take seriously now the satiric irony of: 'O countrymen, seek riches first of all, / Virtue comes after profits.'[17]

When was debauchery more unchecked? When was fornication and adultery more widespread or more unpunished or less a source of disgrace, while princes condone their own vices in others and everyone thinks it fashionable to do whatever has passed into the manners of the court? Who does not look upon poverty as the greatest evil and disgrace? In olden times defamatory abuse was hurled even from passing chariots against debauchers, disreputable persons, braggarts, and worshippers of money.[18] In pagan spectacles the crowd applauded the clever denunciation of vice while today inept praise of it is applauded by leading Christian citizens. The Athenian audience did not tolerate an actor in a tragedy of Euripides portraying the role of a miser,[19] who put riches above all the other advantages of life, and they were about to hiss him and the whole play off the stage if the poet had not stood up and begged them to wait a little longer to see what would become of this worshipper of gold. How many examples there are among the pagans of those who brought nothing home to their humble families after serving the state well other than an honourable reputation; who considered good faith preferable to money, and moral decency to life itself; who did not grow proud in prosperity or become discouraged in adversity; who preferred honourable risks to sensual pleasure; who were happy in the knowledge of leading an upright life without deserving honours or riches or the other favours of fortune? I need not remind you of the virtue of Phocion,[20] the poverty of Fabricius,[21] which he preferred to riches, the generosity of Camillus,[22] the austerity of Brutus,[23] the chastity of Pythagoras,[24] the unrelenting self-control of Socrates, the integrity of Cato,[25] and a thousand illustrious examples of every virtue, which we may read about in the annals of the Spartans, the Persians, the Athenians, and the Romans, to our own great shame.

St Augustine, as he himself testified in his *Confessions*,[26] despised riches long before he put on Christ, counted honours as nothing, was not influenced by praise, and so controlled the pleasures of the flesh that as a young man he was satisfied with one poor little mistress, to whom he even preserved conjugal fidelity. Such sentiments, such examples would not readily be found among courtiers, ecclesiastics, or, I might add, monks. Or if such an individual should exist, he would immediately be singled out as an object of ridicule like an ass among apes.[27] He will be called by one and all deranged, dull-witted, a hypocrite, backwards, melancholic, raving mad and will not even be regarded as a human being. This is the way we Christians venerate the doctrine of Christ, and give practical expression to it, so that by now it is generally believed that there is nothing more irrational, more abject, or more disgraceful than to be a true Christian with all one's heart.[28] It is as if Christ had dwelt on earth in vain or as if Christianity is now something else than it once was or does not pertain to everyone in the same way. I wish, therefore, that you show yourself to be in complete discord with these views and judge the value of all things by their conformity with the standards of Christ.

Who does not think it a splendid thing and to be counted among the greatest blessings to be the descendant of a noble lineage? This is what they call nobility. Do not be unduly impressed when you hear the wise of this world,[29] grave individuals endowed with great authority, discussing the degrees of pedigree with the greatest seriousness, brows knitted, as if it were a matter of great complexity, and uttering meaningless absurdities with great effort. You will see others, too, so swollen with conceit over the images of their ancestors and forebears that they hardly deign to regard the rest of us as men in comparison to them. But casting a cynical sneer[30] on their delusion, contemplate the true reality, which is that the only perfect nobility consists in being reborn in Christ, to be grafted on to his body,[31] and to become one body and one spirit with God.[32] Others may be the sons of kings, but for you the matter of greatest importance is that you are and will be called a son of God.[33] Let others be complacent with themselves because they frequent the courts of princes; you choose with David to be a lowly servant in the house of God.[34] Mark whom Christ has chosen: the infirm, the stupid, the lowly in the eyes of the world.[35] In Adam we are all of lowly birth;[36] in Christ we are all one.[37] True nobility consists in despising empty nobility. It is true nobility to be a servant of Christ.

Consider your ancestors to be those whose virtues you emulate. Listen to what the best judge of nobility said in the gospel against the Jews, who boasted that they were of the race of Abraham. And what kind of man was the founder of their race?[38] Not merely famous, not only wealthy, not only a conqueror of kings, but adorned with God's praise for his godlike virtues. Who would not consider that fact as remarkable and worthy of honour? Listen to what they heard: 'You have the devil for your father and you do the works of your father.'[39] And here is what Paul says, who also measures nobility by the standard of the master: 'For not all who are of Israel by circumcision are Israelites, and not all who are of the seed of Abraham are sons of Abraham.'[40] It is shamefully ignoble to be a slave to moral turpitude, and to have no kinship with Christ, who acknowledges as his own only those who do the will of his father, who is in heaven.[41] One who has the devil for his father is a base illegitimate, and he who does the works of the devil has the devil for his father, unless Christ has lied. But the Truth cannot lie.[42] It is the highest nobility to be both a son and heir of God, a brother and a co-heir of Christ.[43] Let them discover what their family insignia mean. The insignia of Christians are the same for all, but the most illustrious are: the cross, the crown of thorns, the nails, the spear, the stigmata of the Lord, which Paul glories to bear in his body.[44] You see, therefore, what a different opinion of nobility I should like you to have than that held by the common crowd.

Who does not agree with everyone else in calling happy, rich, and fortunate the man who amasses great amounts of gold in his house? But you must consider sufficiently happy, and indeed solely happy, the one who possesses Christ, the sovereign good; who has bought the precious pearl[45] of a good conscience even at the price of all his possessions and of his very life; who has found the treasure of wisdom more precious than all riches;[46] who has bought from Christ, source of greatest wealth, gold that has been refined by fire,[47] so that he may become rich. What are these things, then, that the multitude admires – gold, precious stones, great estates? They are given the false name of riches; the truth is that they are thorns,[48] which choke the seed of the word of God according to the gospel parable. They are burdens, and those laden with them cannot follow the naked Christ by the narrow way or enter the kingdom of heaven through the low gateway.[49] Do not consider yourself one bit better off if you surpass Midas or Croesus in wealth, but more restricted, more impeded, more burdened. He who can firmly despise such things has ample abundance. He to whom Christ promised that nothing would be lacking[50] has been well provided for. He who tastes the manna of the divine word will not go hungry. He who puts on Christ will not be naked.[51] The only loss is a decrease in piety or an increase in vice. Consider it to be a huge gain when your mind has been made better by an accession of virtue. Esteem that nothing is lacking to you if you possess him in whom all things exist.[52]

What is it that the pitiful masses call pleasure? Surely nothing less than what it is said to be. And what is that? It is pure insanity and, as the Greeks are wont to say, the laughter of Ajax,[53] a sweet poison, a seductive perdition. The sole true pleasure is the joy of a pure conscience. The study of the holy Scriptures is a sumptuous banquet; the psalms of the Holy Spirit are the pleasantest of songs; the communion of all the saints is a most joyous fellowship; the enjoyment of truth is the greatest delight. You must merely purify your eyes, your ears, and your palate, and the savour of Christ will begin to become sweet to you. Once you have tasted of him, even if Milesians,[54] Sybarites,[55] profligates,[56] Epicureans,[57] in a word, all the devisers of pleasures were to bring together into one place all their allurements, they will all seem nauseous in comparison with him. That which is pleasing to the taste is not always sweet, unless it is the taste of a man in good health. If water tastes like wine to a man with a fever, no one would call that pleasure, but rather disease. You are mistaken if you do not believe that tears are far more pleasant to the pious than laughter, hilarity, and jests to the impious; or that fasting is sweeter to them than francolin, pheasants, partridges, sturgeon, or turbot are to the others; or that their frugal diet of Pythagorean vegetables[58] and legumes are far more appetizing than the sumptuous delicacies of the others. In fine, true pleasure consists in not being lured away from the love of Christ by false delights.

Now see how the world misuses the words 'love' and 'hatred.' When a mad youth is dying of love for a girl, the common crowd calls that love, whereas there could be no truer form of hatred. True love desires to look after the best interests of others even if one must suffer loss to oneself. And what is that young man aiming at save his own pleasure? Therefore he does not love the girl, but himself, although he really does not even love himself. For no one can love another if he does not love himself first, but in the right way. No one can hate another without first hating himself. But to love well sometimes is to hate rightly and to hate rightly is to have loved. Therefore when one ensnares a girl with flattery and gifts for his own petty advantage (or so he thinks), so that he may deprive her of her most valuable possessions – integrity, modesty, simplicity, a good conscience, a good reputation – do you think this is love or hatred? Obviously there is no hatred more cruel than this. When foolish parents are indulgent towards their children's vices, you hear it said commonly: 'How dearly they love their children.' On the contrary, how cruelly they hate them, if by indulging their own feelings of affection they neglect the salvation of their children. What more constant wish does our most jealous enemy, the devil, have for us than that by sinning here we may incur eternal torment? They call him a mild master and a merciful prince who either connives at or even favours certain crimes so that the more felons are allowed to go unpunished the more freely they may do wrong. But is it not precisely this that the Lord threatens through the prophet against those whom he deems unworthy of his mercy? 'I shall not punish your daughters' he says, 'when they prostitute themselves, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery.'[59] On the other hand what did he promise to David? 'I will punish their transgressions with the rod and their wrongs with floggings. But I will not take away my mercy from them.'[60] See how many things are made new in Christ[61] and how the names of things change their meanings. Whoever loves himself in the wrong way hates himself with an implacable hatred. Whoever takes pity on himself in the wrong way rages violently against himself. To take good care is to neglect. To do salutary harm is to do good. To cause fitting destruction is to save. You will be an object of care to yourself if you despise the desires of the flesh. If you show proper violence against vice, you will do a good service to mankind. If you slay the sinner, you will save the man. If you destroy what man made you will restore what God made.

Let us take now power and weakness, courage and cowardice: what does popular error think them to be? Do they not call powerful the man who can readily do harm to whomever he wishes? And yet it is a hateful kind of power to be able to inflict harm, something that these so-called powerful individuals share in common with beetles and scorpions and the devil himself. God alone is truly powerful, who can neither harm even if he wished to, nor wishes to do so even if he could, since his nature is to do good. But how will the powerful man cause harm to another? Will he take away his money, will he beat his body, will he take away his life? If he does this to a pious man, he has done him a good deed rather than an evil one; but if he does this to a wicked man, the latter may have furnished the occasion, but it is the powerful man who has harmed himself. For no one is harmed except by himself.[62] No one makes ready to harm another unless he first harms himself far more grievously. You prepare to cause me a loss of money, but through the loss of charity you have already given yourself a much greater loss. You cannot inflict a wound upon me unless you have suffered a much crueler wound yourself. You will not rob me of the life of the body unless you have first immolated your own soul. But does not Paul, who was powerless to inflict injury but very strong in bearing it, boast that he can do all things in Christ?[63]

People generally describe as strong and courageous one who is violent and uncontrolled, who seethes with anger at the slightest injury and returns abuse for abuse, evil deed for evil deed. On the other hand, they call one who ignores and keeps quiet about an injury received cowardly, weak, and spiritless. On the contrary, what is further removed from greatness of mind than to lose one's equanimity because of a simple word and to be so incapable of scorning another's stupidity as to think that you are not a man unless you can overcome one wrong by another. How much more courageous it is for a lofty and generous mind to be able to ignore all injury and indeed return good for evil![64] For my part I should not call a person brave because he exhibits daring against the enemy, scales the walls, or exposes himself to all dangers with no regard for his own life, which are things that any gladiator could accomplish. But he who can conquer his own spirit, who can be sincerely well disposed to those who wish him harm, who can behave well to those who behave badly towards him, who can wish well to those who wish him ill, he it is who deserves the name of courageous and magnanimous.

Let us examine likewise what the world calls 'glory,' 'ignominy,' and 'shame.' You are praised. For what and by whom? If for foul deeds by foul persons, this is false glory and true ignominy. You are criticized and made fun of. For what reason and by whom? Because of your piety and your innocence, by wicked persons, of course. This is not ignominy; there is no truer glory. It does not matter if the whole world hisses and rejects you. What Christ approves cannot but be glorious. And if all creation applauds and cries: 'Bravo,' what is displeasing to God cannot but be shameful.

People commonly give the name 'prudence' to the energetic acquisition of wealth, the clever consolidation of what has been acquired and provision for the future. Thus we often hear people saying in all earnestness: 'He is a frugal man, shrewd, sensible, provident,' concerning those who in a short time have made a handsome living for themselves. So speaks the world, which is itself a liar, and its father also.[65] But what does Truth say? 'Fool, this night they will require your soul of you.'[66] He had filled his barns with crops, he had fitted out all his storehouses with provisions, he had laid up great piles of money in his house and thought that there was nothing left to do but to enjoy his accumulated wealth – not, like wild beasts, to keep jealous watch over heaped up riches and remain destitute himself, as poets tell us the dragon watched over the golden fleece.[67] Nevertheless, the gospel calls him foolish. What is more foolish or more senseless than to stare open-mouthed at shadows and lose true reality? That is what makes us laugh in Aesop's fable about the dog.[68] But in the moral conduct of Christians have we not reason also to laugh, or rather cry? He must be accounted an unwise merchant who missed the point of the remark from comedy, 'To ignore money on occasion / Is oft the source of greatest gain,'[69] and would accept a minute present gain knowing that it would be followed by a huge loss. How much more ill advised to make provision with such solicitude for this ephemeral life that can slip away at any moment, whose needs God would have attended to all the same, and to give no thought to the future life, which we will have to lead in direst misery if we have not taken great pains to prepare ourselves for it.

Consider another misconception. They call a person skilled and experienced who, seizing upon every little rumour, knows what is going on in the world. He knows the fortunes of the market-place, what the king of England is plotting, the latest schemes devised in Rome, what has arisen in France, how the Dacians and the Scythians are getting along,[70] and what princes are debating. In short they call a man wise if he is expert in chattering about all kinds of things going on among all types of people. What is more thoughtless or more stupid than to inquire into matters that are taking place far away and have nothing to do with you, and not even to give a thought to what is going on in your own heart, the only things that really concern you? You tell me about the turmoil in England; tell me rather of the agitation stirred up in your heart by anger, envy, lust, and ambition. Tell me how close you are to subduing them, what are the hopes of victory, how much of the war has been accomplished, what is the plan of battle. If you have been vigilant in the conduct of this war, if you have kept eyes and ears equally alert, if you have been wise and circumspect, then I will pronounce you expert. And I will fling back upon the world the reproach it usually hurls at us: he is wise in vain whose wisdom does not regard himself.

If you examine in this way all the cares, joys, hopes, fears, ambitions, and opinions of mankind, you will find them all full of error. They call good evil and evil good; they make the sweet bitter and the bitter sweet; they make light darkness and darkness light.[71] And it is by far the greatest part of mankind that is involved. But you must both despise them if you do not wish to be like them as well as pity them if you desire them to be like you, and, to echo the words of Augustine, at times one must weep for those who should be mocked and at times one must mock those who deserve our tears.[72] 'Do not conform yourself to this world (in evil), but transform yourself by the renewal of your mind, so that you may regard as good (not what men admire but) what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.'[73] You are very close to danger and on the verge of slipping if you begin to look around you at what most people are doing or if you try to discover what they are thinking. Since you are one of the sons of life and of light,[74] let the dead bury their dead,[75] let the blind, leaders of the blind, fall with them into the ditch.[76] Be careful not to turn the eyes of the heart away from your model Christ in any other direction. You will not go astray if you follow the lead of Truth. You will not run into darkness[77] if you walk behind the Light. With this Light shining before you, if you distinguish false good from true good and true evil from false, you will be appalled at the blindness of the multitude rather than imitate it. More violently than any strait of the sea it is churned up and incited towards the emptiest of illusions by the alternating passions of anger, envy, love, hate, fear, joy, and sorrow.[78] Brahmans,[79] Cynics,[80] and Stoics[81] defend their beliefs with grim tenacity and if the world protests with hissing and hooting they still hold pertinaciously to their convictions. Have the courage, also, to fix the dogmas of your sect deeply within your soul; have the courage with full confidence to stand by the teachings of your master.

Beliefs worthy of a Christian

Let these paradoxes of true Christianity be ever before you: that no Christian should think that he was born for himself or should wish to live for himself,[1] but that all that he has or is he should not attribute to himself but accredit to God, its author, and should regard all his goods as common to all. Christian charity knows no exclusivity. Let him love the pious in Christ and the impious for the sake of Christ, who so loved us first when we were still his enemies that he expended himself wholly for our ransom.[2] Let the Christian, therefore, embrace the former because they are good, and the latter as well so that he may render them good. He should not hate any man at all in so far as he is a man, any more than a devoted doctor hates a sick man. Let him be the enemy only of vice. The graver the illness, the greater the care pure charity will administer. He is an adulterer, a sacrilegious person, a Turk; one should abhor the adultery, not the man; show one's aversion for the sacrilege, not the man; kill the Turk, not the man. He should make every effort that the impious man that the other has made of himself should perish, but that the man that God made should be saved. The Christian should be sincerely well disposed towards all men, pray duly for all, do good to all. He should not harm the deserving or benefit the undeserving. He should rejoice at another's prosperity as if it were his own, and be saddened at another's misfortune as if it were his own. This is surely what the Apostle bids us: 'to weep with those who weep, to rejoice with those who rejoice.'[3] He should bear another's sufferings even more grievously than his own, and be happier at another's good fortune than at his own. It is not fitting for a Christian to entertain thoughts like this: 'What have I to do with this fellow? I don't know whether he is black or white.[4] He is unknown to me, a total stranger. He never did me any favours; he offended me once; he was never of any help to me.' None of this! Recall only for what merit of yours Christ bestowed all his gifts. It was his wish that the kindness he conferred upon you would be reciprocated not to himself, but to your neighbour. Consider only what your neighbour's needs are and what you can do for him. Make this one simple reflection: 'He is my brother in the Lord, a co-heir in Christ,[5] a member of the same body, redeemed by the same blood, a partner in the same faith, called to the same grace and happiness of the future life.' As the Apostle said: 'There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in the one hope that came with your calling, one Lord, and one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all men, and exists throughout all things and in all of us.'[6] How can he be a stranger with whom you are joined by such a multiple bond of unity? With the pagans good will or ill will is influenced to some degree by what the orators call circumstances.[7] 'He is a fellow citizen, a relation by marriage, a blood relation,' or the opposite; 'he is a close friend, a friend of my father's, one who did us a good turn, one deserving of gratitude, well-born, rich,' or the opposite. In Christ these things are either nothing at all or, according to Paul, they are all one and the same thing.[8] Let this one thought pass before your mind and let it suffice. 'He is my flesh; he is my brother in Christ.' Is it not so that whatever happens to one member has repercussions on the whole body and therefore on the Head? We are all members one of the other.[9] Members that adhere to each other constitute a body; the Head of the body is Jesus Christ; the Head of

Christ is God.[10] Whatever is done to any member, whether it be good or evil, is done to you, to each individual member, to Christ, to God. These are all one: God, Christ, the body and the members. The common sayings 'Like is attracted to like'[11] and 'Dissimilarity is the mother of hatred' have no rightful place among Christians. Of what use are words of dissension where such unity exists? It does not savour of Christianity that a general animosity should exist between courtier and townsman, countryman and city dweller, patrician and plebeian, magistrate and private citizen, rich man and poor man, a man of renown and one of no notoriety, the powerful and the weak, the Italian and the German, the Frenchman and the Englishman, the Englishman and the Scot, the grammarian and the theologian, the logician and the grammarian, the doctor and the lawyer, the learned man and the illiterate, the eloquent and the inarticulate, the bachelor and the husband, the young man and the old man, the cleric and the layman, the priest and the monk, the Franciscan and the Colletine,[12] the Carmelite[13] and the Dominican,[14] and, not to mention all the divisions, between those who are unlike one another in trivial matters.

Where is charity, which loves even an enemy, when a change of surname, a slight difference in the colour of the habit, a cincture, or a shoe, and similar absurdities that men create for themselves can make me hateful to you? Why do we not rather dismiss these trivialities and accustom ourselves to keep before our eyes what is of real importance, which Paul inculcates into our minds in many a passage, namely, that we are all members of one body in Christ our Head, animated by the same spirit, if we but live in him, so that we do not envy happier members and gladly come to the aid of weaker members. Then we will understand that when we have lent a service to our neighbour it is we who have received a blessing, and when harm is done to our brother it is we who have been injured. No one should pursue merely his own interests, but should contribute to the best of his ability to the common good, so that everything will flow back to its original source, namely, the Head. This is, of course what Paul writes to the Corinthians: 'Indeed just as the body is one, although it has many members, and all the members of the body, although they are many, are still one body, so is it also with Christ. For in one spirit we were all baptized to form one body, Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. The body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say: "Since I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," would that make it any less a part of the body? And if the ear should say: "I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be hearing? If it were all hearing, where would be the sense of smell? But the fact is that God placed each member in the body as he wished. If all of them were one sole member, where would the body be? It is true that there are many members, but only one body. The eye cannot say to the hand: "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet: "I have no need of you." On the contrary those which seem to be the weaker members are more necessary, and those members which we deem less worthy of honour we invest with greater honour. And we give more attention to our shameful parts, since our more worthy parts do not need it. God has so harmonized the parts of the body that he gave greater dignity to that which was inferior so that there would not be discord in the body but that the members would have equal care for one another ... You are the body of Christ and members each in a different fashion.'[15] He writes similarly to the Romans: 'For as in one body we have many members but all members do not have the same function, so though we are many, we are one body in Christ, while individually we are members one of another, possessing different gifts according to the grace that has been given to us.'[16] And again to the Ephesians: 'Rather, by speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way in him who is the Head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by each joint, which contributes its part according to the role assigned to each member, makes for the growth of the body and the building up of charity.'[17] And in other passages he bids us to bear one another's burdens,[18] since we are all members of one another.[19] See, therefore, if those whom you frequently hear speaking in the following way belong to this body: 'My property came to me by inheritance; I possess it by right, not by fraud. Why can I not use it or abuse it as I wish? Why should I give any part of it to those to whom I owe nothing? I squander it, I lose it, but what was lost is mine, and has nothing to do with others.' Your fellow member bares his teeth from hunger, and you belch up partridge flesh. Your naked brother trembles with cold, and so much of your wardrobe is eaten away by moths and rotting with decay. You gamble away a thousand ducats of gold in a single night, while some poor girl, driven by poverty, prostitutes her virginity, and a soul perishes for which Christ gave his life. You say: 'What is it to me? What belongs to me I may treat as I wish.' And afterwards, with such feelings, do you still consider yourself a Christian, when you are not even a man? In a crowded assembly you hear the good name of such and such a person being maligned, but you keep silent or perhaps you smile at the detractor. 'I would have refuted him,' you say, 'if anything he said pertained to me. But I have nothing to do with the person who was being slandered.' Then you have nothing to do with the body, if you have nothing in common with a member of it. Nor do you have anything to do with the Head, if you have nothing to do with the body.

'It is right to repel force with force,' they say. I make no objections to what the laws of the empire permit; but I wonder how such statements could have found acceptance among Christians. 'I did harm, but I was provoked. I preferred to do harm rather than have it done to me.' Fine! Human laws do not punish what they have permitted. But what will Christ, your emperor, do if you are unfaithful to his law, which is found in Matthew: 'But I tell you not to offer resistence to an evil person, but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, offer him the other also, and if someone wishes to take you to court and wants your tunic as a surety, give him your cloak also. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him ... Love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute and bring false accusations against you, so that you may be children of your Father, who is in heaven, who makes his sun rise on the bad as well as the good, and his rain to fall on the just and the unjust.'[20] You reply: 'He did not speak *these words to me. He spoke to the apostles, to the perfect.' Didn't you hear:* '... so that you may be children of your Father'? If you do not desire to be the son of God, the law does not apply to you. And yet he who does not wish to be perfect will not be good either. Reflect on this also, that if you wish no reward, this law does not apply to you. For the passage continues: 'If you love those who love you, what reward do you have?'[21] Which is to say, none. It is not virtue to do this, but it is wrong not to do it. Neither party owes anything to the other when each repays the other in turn. Listen to Paul, the great expert and interpreter of the Christian law: 'Bless those who persecute you; bless them, do not curse them ... Return no one evil for evil ... If it is possible, as far as in you lies, be at peace with all men. Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but leave that to God's anger. For it is written: "Vengeance is mine, and I shall repay, says the Lord." Rather, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink. By so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'[22]

'Then what will happen,' you say, 'if I encourage another's effrontery by mild behaviour and by suffering a previous injury invite a new one upon myself?' If you can avoid or repel evil without committing evil yourself, no one forbids you to do so. But if not, beware of saying: 'It is better to do than to have done to you.' If you can, correct him either by overwhelming him with good deeds or by winning him over by gentleness. If not, it is preferable that one perish rather than both; it is better that you be enriched by the acquisition of patience than that both of you become evil by mutually returning evil for evil. Let it be decreed as a Christian law to contend with one another in love, gentleness, and kindness, and to submit gladly even to the most lowly when it comes to quarreling, hatred, criticism, insult, and injury. 'But he is not worthy of receiving kindness or indulgence.' But it is worthy of you that you do this; Christ is worthy, for whose sake it is done. 'I do not wish to harm anyone,' they say, 'and I shall not allow myself to be harmed.' On the contrary, if harm has been done to you, forgive the injury from the heart, being careful that there is nothing for which someone must forgive you. Be as vigilant in avoiding your own shortcomings as you are ready to pardon the faults of others. The more prominent you are, the more you should lower yourself,[23] so that you may devote yourself to all men in charity. If you are of noble lineage, behaviour worthy of Christ will not obscure the nobility of your race, but will enhance it. If you are learned, it is with all the more restraint that you must support and correct the ignorance of the unlearned. The more that has been confided to you, the more you are in debt to your brother.[24] If you are rich, remember that you are the administrator, not the master of your wealth, and be very careful how you manage property held in common. Did you think it was only to monks that private possessions were forbidden and poverty imposed? You were wrong. Both rules were meant for all Christians. The law punishes you if you take something that belongs to another, but it does not punish you if you withhold what is yours from your brother in need. Christ will punish both offences. If you are in public office, do not let this honour make you more arrogant, but may the onus make you more responsible to the needs of others. You say: 'I do not have an ecclesiastical position; I am not a pastor or a bishop.' Granted, but is that to say you are not a Christian? You tell us, then, what is your affiliation if you are not of the church. Christ has fallen into such contempt in the eyes of the world that they think it is a fine and noble thing to have nothing to do with him, and that one is the more worthy of contempt the more he is associated with Christ. Do you not hear every day how enraged laymen hurl in our face the names of 'cleric,' 'priest,' and 'monk' as if this were a terrible insult, in the same spirit and tone of voice as if they were reproaching us for incest and sacrilege. I am surprised that they do not use the word baptism as a term of abuse, and together with the Saracens attach a sense of ignominy to the name of Christ. If they were to call a cleric wicked or a priest unworthy or a monk irreligious, that would be admissible, since they would be censuring men's conduct, not expressing contempt for the profession of virtue. But if those who glory in the violation of virgins, the plunder of war, the wins or losses of gambling, and similar misdeeds have nothing more scornful, abusive, or vilifying to charge against another than the name of monk or priest, then it is no mystery what these Christians in name only think about Christ.

There is no separate Lord for bishops and another for civil magistrates. Both represent the same Lord. To the same Lord an account will be rendered. If in accepting or fulfilling a public office you look to anything else but him alone, it does not matter if the world does not call you a simoniac; he will surely punish you as a simoniac. If you aspire after public office, not to benefit the common good, but to fill your own coffers, so that you may take vengeance on those to whom you bear ill will, your office is an act of brigandage in the eyes of God. You pursue robbers not to restore the stolen goods to their rightful owner but in order to have a share in their loot. What difference is there between you and them, except for the fact that they are robbers of merchants, and you a robber of robbers? In a word, if you do not fulfill your office in such a way as to be ready to sacrifice not only your possessions but your life to safeguard justice, Christ will not approve of your performance of your duties.

I shall add likewise the precept taken from Plato that no one is worthy of public office who exercises it willingly.[25] If you are a prince, take care that you are not taken in by those beguiling words of flatterers: 'You are lord, you are free, above the law. All that you do is just and honourable. Whatever pleases you is permissible. What priests usually say does not apply to you.' The truth is that you must consider Christ Jesus the Lord of all men and you must resemble him as much as possible, since you take his place. His teaching must be exemplified more scrupulously by you than by anyone else, and you will be held more accountable than anyone else. Do not think that whatever you wish is right, but wish only what is right. Whatever would have been dishonourable for anyone else do not imagine as being honourable for you. On the contrary, do not even permit yourself those things that are usually excused in the masses. What for others would be a minor offence, impute to yourself as an act of infamy. It is not your greater than ordinary wealth that should win you honour, admiration, esteem, favour, and influence, but your manner of life, which stands out above that of the common people. Let them not learn to admire in you those qualities by which they are attracted to the very crimes for which you daily exact punishment. Take away the fascination with riches, and where will you find thieves, embezzlers, robbers of churches, highwaymen? Take away the idolatry of sensual pleasures and where will you find abductors and adulterers? If you wish to appear more impressive in the eyes of your entourage, do not expose your wealth to the view of imbeciles; if more prosperous, do not make an obtrusive display of luxuriousness and extravagance. Let them learn from you before all others to despise such things; let them learn to respect virtue, appreciate frugality, applaud restraint, pay honour to moderation. Let none of those deficiencies of public behaviour that are punished by the power of your office become apparent in your own conduct. You will reduce the incidence of crime most effectively if they see that you make little account of the incitements to crime – riches and pleasures. Do not feel contempt for the least member of society in comparison with yourself. It was on equal terms that the common price of your redemption was paid. You will be protected from contempt not by the turmoil of ambition, not by violence, nor by arms nor bodyguards, but by uprightness of life, personal severity, and morals untainted by the vices of the multitude.

Nothing prevents you from holding the highest place in carrying out your princely functions while at the same time making no distinction of place in showing charity to your subjects. Consider that the essence of princely power is not to surpass others in wealth, but to be of service to the greatest number possible. Do not turn to your own advantage what belongs to the people, but give freely of your possessions and of yourself for the common good. The people owe you much, but you owe them everything. Even if your ears have to hear the proud titles of 'Invincible,' 'Inviolable,' and 'Majesty,' *in your mind, at least, do not acknowledge them, but refer all these titles to* Christ, to whom solely they belong. Let the charge of *lèse-majesté,* which others magnify in tragic accents, be of little concern to you.[26] It is he who commits an act of cruelty, violence, or infamy against the law in the name of the prince who is the real offender against the sovereignty of the prince. Let no other injury cause you less provocation than one directed at your own person. Remember that you are a public figure and you must think only of the public good. If you are a man of good sense, do not reflect on how powerful you are, but how great a burden you bear on your shoulders. And the greater the danger you are involved in, the less you should gratify your own wishes, seeking your model of governing not from your forbears or from flatterers, but from Christ. What is more absurd than that a Christian prince should set before himself the example of Hannibal, Alexander the Great, Caesar, or Pompey. While even in these leaders there are certain virtues that he cannot attain, he will imitate in particular those very qualities that should be avoided. Example should not be drawn from those exploits of Caesar lauded by historians, but from those which are not at variance with the teaching of our Lord or are of such a nature that even though they are not to be imitated, they may incite us to the pursuit of virtue. Not even a whole empire should be of such importance to you that you would willingly deviate from right conduct. Divest yourself of power rather than divest yourself of Christ. Have no doubt that he has something to repay you for the power you have disdained, a far better reward than power. There is nothing so noble, so magnificent, or so glorious for men of kingly state than to approach as closely as possible to the likeness of the supreme king, Jesus, who was both the greatest and best[27] of kings. He dissembled here on earth his infinite greatness, preferring that we perceive his sovereign goodness, because it is this that he wished us to imitate. He said that his kingdom was not of this world,[28] although he was lord of heaven and earth. But while 'the rulers of nations lord it over them,'[29] the Christian does not exercise power over his subjects, but charity, and 'he who is greatest should esteem himself as the servant of all,'[30] not the master. For that reason I am all the more astonished that these ambitious titles of power and dominion have been transferred to supreme pontiffs and bishops and that theologians are not abashed in their ignorance and ostentation to call themselves commonly 'masters,'[31] although Christ forbade his disciples to allow themselves to be called either 'lord' or 'master,' for there is one who is both lord and master,[32] who is also the Head of us all, Christ Jesus. The words 'apostle,' 'pastor,' and 'bishop' are the names of an office, not of lordship. 'Pope' and 'abbot' are titles that express charity, not power.

But why do I plunge into this sea of common errors? No matter what class of men he turns to, the truly spiritual man will find everywhere things that will make him laugh, but many more that will make him weep. He will discover a great number of completely distorted notions, widely removed from the teaching of Christ. A good part of these opinions derive from the fact that we have introduced even into Christianity a certain meaning of the word 'world.' What we read about the world in ancient theologians has now been made to refer to those who are not monks, according to some men of little learning. The 'world' in the gospel, in the writings of the apostles, Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome is the name given to disbelievers, strangers to the faith, enemies of the cross of Christ,[33] blasphemers against God. Such men are anxious about tomorrow, since they have no confidence in Christ; they struggle for wealth, power, and pleasures, since they have been blinded by the illusions of sensible things and embrace false blessings instead of true. This world does not know Christ, the true light.[34] This world, totally rooted in evil,[35] loves itself, lives for itself, seeks its own interests. It does not put on Christ,[36] who is true love. Christ separated from this world[37] not only the apostles, but all those whom he judged worthy of himself. How is it, then, I pray you, that we mix this 'world,' which has always been condemned in the Scriptures, with Christianity, and flatter our vices with the empty word, 'world.'

Many 'doctors,' 'adulterating the word of God,' as Paul says,[38] add to this scourge, adapting divine Scripture to the customs of the times, when it would be more fitting to reform morals according to the norm of the Scriptures. There is no more fatal kind of flattery than to use the words of the gospel or of the prophets to favour the diseases of the soul rather than cure them. The prince hears: 'All power is from God,'[39] and immediately 'the crest rises on his head.'[40] Why did the Scripture make you swollen-headed rather than responsible? You say to yourself that God has entrusted you with the power to rule, and do you not reflect that he will also require an account of your administration?[41] An avaricious man hears that it is forbidden to Christians to have two tunics.[42] The theologian interprets this to mean that the second tunic refers to whatever is over and above the needs of nature and pertains to the vice of cupidity.[43] 'Good,' says that Crassus,[44] 'there are still many things lacking to me.' A brutish individual, unfeeling to the needs of charity, hears that the order of charity is that you prefer your own money to another's, your own life to another's, and your own reputation to that of another. Therefore he says: 'I shall not give anything, lest I be in need myself. I shall not defend his reputation, lest some blemish should be cast on my own. I shall desert my brother in danger, lest I expose myself to danger. In short, I shall live entirely for myself, lest on some account I suffer some disadvantage.' We have also learned from saintly men to take only as an example of life whatever they did that does not merit imitation. Adulterers and men of violence flatter themselves with the example of David.[45] Those who pore over their purses adduce the example of the rich Abraham.[46] Princes who consider it a pleasant pastime to deflower young girls hither and yon enumerate for us the queens and concubines of Solomon.[47] Those whose god is their belly[48] put forward the drunkenness of Noah[49] as a pretext. The incestuous cloak their base desires with the sexual intercourse of Lot with his daughters.[50]

Why do we turn our eyes away from Christ toward these examples? I venture to say that nothing in the lives of the apostles or the prophets should be imitated by Christians if it deviates from the teaching of Christ. I do not protest if one wishes to imitate sinner-saints, provided their whole life is imitated. You have followed David the adulterer; follow him rather as the penitent.[51] You have reproduced the image of Mary Magdalene as a sinner; imitate her as one who loved much; imitate her in her tears; imitate her as she casts herself at the feet of Jesus.[52] You have persecuted the church of God with Paul,[53] you have perjured yourself with Peter;[54] stretch out your neck to the executioner with Paul[55] in devotion to Christ and with Peter do not shrink from the cross.[56] God allows even great saints to fall into certain vices so that when we fall we will not despair, but only on condition that just as we were companions of their error, so we will also accompany them in their recovery from error. As it is, we exaggerate what should not have been imitated and like spiders we distort their good actions, sucking out only what is poisonous and turning even the wholesome juice into poison. What do you have in common with the rich Abraham, you whose god is money? Just because he became rich from the abundance of his cattle through God's favour – and that was still under the law of the flesh – does it mean that you, a Christian, should be allowed to amass wealth worthy of Croesus, which you then dissipate utterly, or worse still, bury in your house? How little affected Abraham was by the riches that came flooding in upon him without his willing it may be shown by the fact that as soon as he heard the divine command, he led out his son to be immolated.[57] How much regard do you think he had for his herds of cattle if he had such disregard even for his son? And you, who dream of nothing else but gain, have respect only for money, and are prepared at the prospect of the slightest little profit to deceive your brother or ignore Christ, do you think you have something in common with Abraham? When the daughters of Lot saw their whole country in flames,[58] thinking in their simplicity that what was visible to their eyes constituted the whole world, and that no mortal would survive this holocaust other than themselves, they lay furtively with their father not out of base desire but out of filial piety lest there would be nothing left of the human race at a time when the divine command 'increase and multiply'[59] was still in force. Will you have the audacity to compare your prodigious debaucheries with the action of these girls? Indeed I should not hesitate to regard your marriage as inferior to their incest since in the married state your purpose is not to produce offspring but to gratify your lust. David, after giving so many outstanding examples of piety, fell once into adultery, the opportunity having been offered to him, not sought after. For that reason will it then be licit for you to go rolling with impunity from one bedroom to another for a whole lifetime? Peter, in fear of death, once denied Christ, for whom he was later to die; will you be permitted to commit perjury for any reason whatever? Paul did not sin intentionally, but fell unsuspectingly into error;[60] when he was made aware of it, he immediately came to his senses again. You with full consciousness and knowledge and with your eyes open grow old in vice,[61] and you console yourself with the example of Paul. As soon as Matthew heard the command, without the slightest delay he left his customs-post once and for all.[62] But as for you, the slave of money, the divers examples of the saints, the repeated listening to the Gospels, and sermons without end cannot tear you away from your vice. Bishops tell me: 'We read that Augustine had two mistresses.'[63] But he was a pagan at that time, while we were brought up under Christianity. He was a young man, we are old and grey. An interesting comparison! Since he as a young pagan in order not to be ensnared in the toils of matrimony took a young woman to live with him in place of a wife and showed her true marital fidelity though she was not his wife, does that make it any less shameful for us Christians – old men, priests, and bishops – to befoul ourselves in the mire of lust? The end has come for the preservation of good morals once we have given the name of virtues to vices and have begun to be more clever in defending our faults than assiduous in correcting them, especially if we have become masters at nurturing and sustaining our erroneous ideas with the false authority of the sacred Scriptures.

Therefore, my dearest brother, hold the common crowd with its opinions and actions in complete contempt and take hold sincerely and entirely of Christian principles. Whatever is offered to the senses in this life, whether it be something to be feared or desired, disregard it all equally through love of piety. Let Christ alone, the only author of right thinking and the holy life, be sufficient for you. To be sure, the world looks upon this as mere stupidity and madness, but in this way God wished to save believers.[64] It is a blessed foolishness to be wise in Christ. It is a wretched foolishness not to have understanding of Christ. But wait! While I wish that you forcefully separate yourself from the common crowd, at the same time I do not want you to revive the practices of the Cynics by snarling indiscriminately at the beliefs and deeds of others, haughtily condemning everyone in horrid outcries, and delivering mad harangues against all without distinction.[65] You would thus be inflicting double harm upon yourself – first, you would incur everyone's hatred; and, second, on account of your unpopularity you would not be able to be of help to anyone. You, too, must be all things to all men,[66] so that you may win everyone to the side of Christ, as far as it is possible, without giving offence to piety. Adapt yourself to everyone exteriorly, provided that interiorly your resolution remains unshaken. Exteriorly let your friendliness, affability, good nature, and obligingness win over your brother, who should be attracted to Christ in an appealing manner and not put off by harshness of behaviour. In a word, you must express your sentiments not in thundering utterances, but in your conduct. On the other hand you must not be so indulgent to the weakness of the common person that you do not have the courage to defend the truth vigorously when the occasion arises. Men must be corrected, not deceived, by kindness.

The seventh rule

If through the childishness and weakness of our minds, we are not yet able to aspire to these spiritual heights, we should none the less apply ourselves with undiminished vigour to approach them as closely as possible. Aside from this, the true and quickest road to happiness is so to direct our minds to the admiration of heavenly things that as the body produces a shadow, so the love of Christ, the love of the good and of the eternal will automatically bring with it a repugnance for passing things and a hatred of lowly things. In both cases one thing necessarily follows the other, and the one either increases or decreases with the other. The more you progress in the love of Christ, the more you hate the world. The more you admire invisible things, the more transitory and momentary things will appear worthless. Therefore in the acquiring of virtue we must do what Quintilian counsels in the study of literature, that we aim immediately at the best.[1] But if owing to our failings we cannot attain to this, then the next best thing is that, inspired at least by a certain natural prudence, we abstain from great vice and, as far as possible, preserve ourselves intact for the gifts of divine munificence. For just as the body that is exhausted and shrunken but still free of noxious humours is closer to health, so a mind not yet tainted with grave faults even though it is still lacking in true virtue is more capable of receiving the divine gift. If we are still too weak to imitate the apostles, martyrs, and virgins, let us at least not let it appear that the pagans outstrip us in this race. For many of them, without knowledge of a god of whom they could stand in awe and without believing in a hell that could inspire them with fear, still believed that shameful conduct was to be avoided *per se* at any cost, so much so that some preferred to sacrifice fame, wealth, and even life itself rather than depart from moral rectitude. If in itself sin is such that it ought not to be committed for whatever advantage or even disadvantage that might derive from it, surely if the Christian is not deterred by the justice of God or dissuaded by the thought of God's generosity, if neither hope of immortality nor fear of eternal punishment can restrain him, then let the thousand disadvantages that attend the sinner even in this life act as a deterrent. I speak of ill-fame, loss of wealth, penury, the contempt and hatred of good men, mental anxiety, restlessness, and worst of all, a tormented conscience. Some may not be aware of it at present, blinded by the dull perception of youth or inebriated by the pleasures of sin, but they will sense it later, and the more delayed their awakening the more disastrous it will be. Therefore the young in particular should be advised to believe the opinions of so many authoritative writers concerning the nature of sin rather than to discover it in their own lives by their own unhappy experience. It would be better that they be warned not to defile their lives with vice before they know clearly what life is. If Christ is of little account to you, although you cost him dearly, refrain from base conduct at least for your own sake. And although it is dangerous to remain any longer in this state, as if at the crossroads,[2] as they say, nevertheless for those who cannot yet rise to heroic virtue, it would be much more advantageous to have a firm footing in civic virtue[3] than to plunge precipitously into all manner of immorality. This is not the final goal of happiness, but from there one is one step closer to happiness. In the mean time we must pray to God that he deign to draw us to better things.[4]

Eighth rule

If the storms of temptation descend upon you more frequently and more violently, do not immediately begin to be dissatisfied with yourself as if you were not dear to your God or pleasing in his sight, or as if you were lacking in piety or any less perfect. On the contrary, give thanks that he is training you as a future heir,[1] chastising you as a dear son, putting you to the test as a friend. It is greatest proof that a man has been rejected by divine mercy when he is assailed by no temptations. Let the words of Paul the Apostle, who deserved to be admitted to the mysteries of the third heaven and yet was buffeted by the angel of Satan, come to mind.[2] Let Job, the friend of God, come to your aid, Jerome, Benedict, Francis, and with them countless other holy Fathers of the church, who were tormented by the greatest vices. If your sufferings were the common lot of so many great men, why are you dejected? Strive rather to be victorious with them. God will not abandon you and he will provide you with a means of escape so that you may be able to endure it.[3]

Ninth rule

Experienced generals set guards even when things are peaceful. In like manner your mind must be vigilant and alert in anticipation of the future attacks of the enemy. For he is ever on the prowl, seeking someone to devour.[1] So that you will be more prepared to repulse and rebuff his attack immediately and vigorously, crush the head of the pestiferous serpent[2] right from the start. There is no other place in which he will be more easily or more completely vanquished. The best plan of action is to dash the little ones of Babylon against the rock,[3] which is Christ,[4] as soon as they are born, before they grow up.

Tenth rule

The tempter is best repelled by these means: when he suggests some evil thought, turn your mind away from him energetically and spit upon him, as it were, or pray fervently, or apply yourself with all your mind to some pious occupation, or answer the tempter with words taken from the Scriptures,[1] as we advised previously.[2] In this matter it will be of no little advantage against all sorts of temptation to have certain passages ready, especially those which you know have been effective in stirring up feelings of religious fervour.

Eleventh rule

The pious are exposed to a twofold danger: the one, that they succumb to temptation; and the other, that after their victory they become proud in consolation and spiritual joy. In order, therefore, that you may be free not only of nocturnal fear but also of the noonday devil,[1] be sure when the enemy incites you to shameful acts not to rely on your own weakness, but to remember merely that you are capable of all things in Christ,[2] who said not only to his apostles, but also to you, and even to his least members: 'Have confidence, for I have overcome the world.'[3] On the other hand, when after the defeat of the instigator or at the completion of some pious action you feel that your mind is immersed in a kind of secret interior pleasure, then be on your guard, again and again, not to attribute anything to your own merits,[4] but ascribe it all to the free gift of God, and check yourself with these words of Paul: 'What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you take pride in yourself as if you did not receive it?'[5] Against this twofold evil there will be a twofold remedy: if in the struggle, distrustful of your own strength, you take refuge in Christ the Head and put all your hope of victory in his goodness, and if in moments of spiritual consolation you *immediately give him thanks for his kindness, humbly recognizing your own* unworthiness.

Twelfth rule

When you do battle with the enemy, do not be satisfied with deflecting his blow or even repelling his attack, but bravely seizing the weapon, turn it back upon the attacker, cutting his throat with his own sword. This can be done if when you are tempted to evil you not only do not sin, but you make the temptation an occasion for the practice of virtue.[1] And just as in the elegant imagination of the poets Hercules grew in courage and determination from the perils thrust upon him by Juno in her anger,[2] so you also see to it that you not only do not become worse from the harassments of the enemy, but even emerge from the battle as a better man. If you are tempted to lust, acknowledge your weakness and deprive yourself a little more even of licit pleasures, and add a little surplus to the performance of chaste and pious activities. If you are incited to greed and graspingness, increase your almsgiving. If you are driven to vainglory, abase yourself all the more in everything. In this way every temptation will become for you a renewal of your holy intentions and an increase of piety. There is absolutely no other method that is so effective in subduing and routing the enemy. For he will be afraid of challenging you again for fear that he who takes delight in being the instigator of impiety should furnish an occasion for piety.

Thirteenth rule[1]

Fight with the conviction and the hope that this will be your last battle if you emerge victorious. For it may happen that God in his generosity may bestow this reward on your virtue, that once the enemy has been shamefully defeated, he will never seek you out again, as we read was granted to some pious men. Origen is not absurd in his belief that when Christians are victorious the enemy's forces are diminished, for once he has been strongly repulsed, he is never permitted to return to the attack.[2] Therefore have courage in the struggle to hope for unending peace. But again, when you are victorious, conduct yourself in such a way as if you were soon to return to the fray. For we must expect one temptation after another and must never put down our arms, never desert our post, never relax our guard, while we are in the garrison of this body. We must always keep that prophetic utterance in our heart: 'I shall stand watch.'[3]

Fourteenth rule

We must be especially on our guard that we do not dismiss any vice as negligible. No foe has ever been more victorious than one who was held in contempt. It is my experience that in this regard many mortals are miserably deceived. Their error is to ignore one vice or another that they consider venial by their own moral standards and to reserve weighty imprecations for all the rest. A great part of those whom the crowd calls upright and uncorrupted thoroughly detest theft, pillage, murder, adultery, and incest. But they make no effort to avoid simple fornication or the moderate enjoyment of sensual pleasure, considering them to be venial offences. One man, quite irreproachable in other respects, is given to drinking or shameless debauchery; another uses rather licentious language, another is empty-headed and boastful. What vice will we be without if everyone deludes himself in this way? The conclusion must be that those who are complacent in any one vice do not really possess any of the other virtues, but only appearances of true virtue, which either nature or upbringing or habit instilled even in the minds of pagans. And yet whoever curses any one vice with Christian hatred must necessarily detest every vice. One whose mind is permeated by true charity makes war on the whole horde of vices with equal hatred and does not deceive himself in venial failings, lest he slip gradually from lesser into greater faults and while he is negligent in trivial matters fall short in matters of the greatest importance. And if perhaps you are not able to pull out the root of vices, nevertheless you can daily pluck out some part of your ills and add something to good morals. In that way that huge pile mentioned by Hesiod[1] will decrease or increase.

Fifteenth rule[1]

If you are terrified by the toil you must undergo in the battle against temptations, this will be the remedy: do not compare the hardship of the battle with the pleasure of sin, but compare the present bitterness of the battle with the future bitterness of sin that accompanies the defeated; then compare the present sweetness of vice, which allures you, with the future sweetness of victory and tranquillity of mind that accompanies the stalwart fighter, and you will immediately see how unequal is the comparison. But the less cautious are deceived on this point, because they compare the bitterness of the fight with the delights of sin without taking into account the consequences that follow on each of them. A much graver and more lasting displeasure awaits the vanquished than the pain that the victor had to suffer in the contest, and likewise a far greater and more lasting pleasure awaits the victor than the pleasure that dragged the vanquished into sin. Whoever makes trial of either of them will easily give judgment. But no Christian *should be so faint-hearted that though he must succumb daily to temptation* he should not desire to experience at least once what it is to overcome temptation. The more often he will do so, the sweeter will be the victory.

Sixteenth rule

If ever you receive a deadly wound, take care that you do not immediately throw away your shield, lay down your weapons, and surrender yourself to the enemy. I have seen this happen to many, whose spirit is so weak and effeminate by nature that once they have fallen to the ground they cease to resist, abandon themselves completely to their emotions, and do not think of recovering their freedom. This faint-heartedness is extremely dangerous, and even when not combined with the worst of temperaments, it usually leads to the worst quality of all, despair. Against this the mind must be fortified by this rule of conduct, that when we have fallen into sin we should not despair, but imitate brave soldiers, who often not only refuse to flee through fear of disgrace or from the sorrow at having received a wound, but are spurred on and reanimated to fight more courageously than before.

In the same way, when we have been led into mortal sin let us hasten immediately to regain our courage and to repair the ignominy of our fall by a new enthusiasm for the acquisition of virtue. It is easier to heal one wound rather than many, and a fresh wound rather than one that is chronic and already festering. Rouse yourself with that well-known verse, which Demosthenes is said to have used frequently: 'The man who flees will fight again.'[1] Think of the prophet David, King Solomon, Peter, prince of the church, Paul the Apostle, such great lights of sanctity, who none the less fell into great sin. Perhaps God allowed them to fall so that when you fell you would not despair. Raise yourself up on your feet, now, with great courage, and return to the fight both with more ardour and with more prudence. It is sometimes the case that for men of piety mortal sins increase their piety, since those who have sinned more shamefully love more ardently.

Seventeenth rule

Against certain attacks of the tempter certain remedies are more appropriate. But the one remedy that is most efficacious against every kind of adversity and temptation is the cross of Christ, which is at one and the same time an example for sinners, a solace for those who are distressed, and an armament for those who are engaged in the fight. This one weapon should be thrust against all the weapons of the evil one. You must be exercised thoroughly in the meaning of the cross, but not after the manner of the common people. They reread every day the story of the Lord's passion, or they worship the image of the cross, or they cover their body with a thousand signs of the cross, or they keep a fragment of the sacred wood in their homes, or at certain fixed hours recall the suffering of Christ in such a way that they suffer together with him and weep over him with human emotion as if he were a just man who had suffered undeservedly.[1] This is not the true fruit of that tree, but for the time being it may be the milk of childish souls.[2] But you, climb to the top of the palm tree to pick its real fruit. The chief fruit is this, that as members we strive to be conformable to the Head in mortifying our passions, which are our members on earth. This should not only not be unpleasant for us, but highly desirable and pleasant, provided that the spirit of Christ lives in us.[3] Who can love anyone if he enjoys being as unlike him as possible? But in order to meditate on the mystery of the cross with greater profit it will be necessary that everyone prepare a method for himself, a kind of pious art of warfare, and train himself diligently in it, so that whenever circumstances demand it he will be ready. It might be something of this nature: that for each passion that you must crucify you apply that part of the cross which best corresponds to it.[4] There is no temptation or adversity that does not have its own proper remedy in it. For example, when you are titillated by the ambition of this world, when you are ashamed at being ridiculed and despised, think, lowliest member, how great is Christ your Head, and to what depths he abased himself for your sake. When the evil of envy invades your spirit, remember how generously, how unfeignedly he expended himself for our needs and how good he was even to the worst of men. When you are tempted to gluttony, recall how he was given gall and vinegar to drink.[5] When you are tempted by base desire, remember how the entire life of the Head was removed from all pleasures, how full it was of discomforts, anguish, and affliction. When you are moved to anger, let him come immediately to your aid who like a lamb was mute before the shearer and did not open his mouth.[6] If you chafe under the constraints of poverty or are lured by desire for possessions, let that Lord of all things come immediately to mind, who became so poor for your sake[7] that he had no place to lay his head.[8] If you act this way in all other temptations, not only will it not be difficult to have held your passions in check, but it will even be pleasant, because you will know that in this way you conform yourself to the Head and show your gratitude to him, as it were, for the immense sorrows he endured for your sake.

Eighteenth rule[1]

This remedy is by far the most effective for those who have progressed some distance along the road of life. For those who are weaker it will also be profitable when their affections are moved to impiety to call up before their mind's eye how loathesome, how detestable, how deadly a thing is sin, and how great is the dignity of man by contrast. Even in matters of little importance we take counsel within ourselves. And in this most important of all matters, before we bind ourselves to the devil by written assent, so to speak, shall we not reflect that we have been created by a supreme craftsman, constituted in an excellent state of being, redeemed at a great price[2] and destined for great happiness? Man is a noble animal, for whose sake alone God fashioned this marvellous contrivance of the world; he is the fellow citizen of the angels, son of God, heir of immortality, member of Christ, member of the church; our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit;[3] our minds are both the images and shrines of divinity. On the contrary sin is a foul pestilence and the scourge of mind and body. Both of these bloom again into their native splendour through the effect of innocence, but both wither away even in this world by the contagion of sin. Sin is a deadly virus of the unspeakably unclean serpent, a contract with the devil and the most foul and wretched slavery. When you have weighed these and similar considerations in your mind, ask yourself over and over again whether it is advisable for the sake of the counterfeit, fleeting, and poisoned little pleasure of sin, to fall from such great dignity into such great shame, from which you can never free yourself by your own efforts.

Nineteenth rule

Next compare the two sources, so unlike each other, God and the devil. Of the one you make yourself an enemy by sinning, the other you establish as your master. Through innocence and grace you are admitted into the number of the friends of God;[1] you are adopted into the privilege and inheritance of sons.[2] Through sin, however, you are made both the slave and son of the devil.[3] One is the eternal font and ideal of the highest beauty, the greatest pleasure, the highest good, which communicates itself to all things. The other is the father of all evils, of extreme wickedness, of the greatest unhappiness. Remember the blessings bestowed upon you by the one and the injuries of the other. With what goodness did the one create you? With what mercy did he redeem you? With what generosity did he enrich you? With what gentleness does he not support your daily imperfections? With what happiness does he welcome your repentance? In contrast to all this, with what jealousy has the devil not long been treacherously plotting against your salvation? Into what woes has he thrown you? And what does he strive for each day but to drag the whole human race with him into eternal doom? When you have made all these calculations, weighing each side carefully, reflect within yourself: 'Shall I, forgetful of my origin, forgetful of such great benefits, for the sake of a tiny gain of false pleasure, ungratefully renounce such a noble, loving, and deserving Father and enslave myself of my own accord to the foulest and cruelest of masters? Shall I not at least offer to God what I would offer to the most insignificant human being for a service rendered? Shall I not flee the devil as I would flee a man who wished to do me harm?'

Twentieth rule[1]

Nor are the rewards any less unequal than their authors are unlike each other. What is more unequal than eternal death and eternal life, to enjoy without end the supreme good in the company of the citizens of heaven or to suffer the greatest torments of evil without end in the wretched company of the damned? Whoever has any doubts in this matter is not even a man, not to say a Christian. He who does not reflect on it is madder than madness itself.

Moreover, besides these considerations, even in this life piety and impiety have their own very distinct fruits. From the former one obtains secure tranquillity of mind and that blessed joy of a pure mind, which once tasted, it will be discovered that the world possesses nothing so precious, so agreeable that one would wish to exchange for it. From impiety, on the other hand, in addition to a thousand other evils there follows that most miserable anguish of a mind conscious of its guilt. In the one case there is the hundredfold increase of spiritual joy, which Christ promised in the gospel as an earnest of eternal happiness.[2] These are those marvelous gifts of which the Apostle speaks,[3] which neither eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived, which God has prepared for those who love him, yes, even in this life. In the mean time the worm of the impious does not die,[4] and they suffer their hell in this life. The flame in which the rich banqueter mentioned in the Gospel is punished,[5] and the torments of hell of which poets have written at great length, are nothing other than the perpetual anxiety of mind that accompanies the habit of sinning. Therefore one may exclude, if he so wishes, the very different rewards of the future life, but virtue still has an additional reason why it should be abundantly sought after, while sin carries with it a concomitant factor which should make us stand in horror of it.

Twenty-first rule

Reflect also on how wretched and fleeting is the present life, how death threatens us insidiously on every side, and how it catches us unawares without discrimination. And since no one is certain of how long his life will last, what an immense peril it is to adjourn the trial of life, in which if sudden death seizes you (as often happens), you are lost forever!

Twenty-second rule

Then impenitence must always be feared, the last of all evils, especially when one reflects how few there are out of so many who truly recover from their sins with their whole heart, especially those who have drawn the ropes of iniquity to the very end of their lives. The fall into wickedness is slippery and easy. 'To retrace one's step and pass to the upper airs ... That is the task and that the toil.'[1] Instructed by the example of Aesop's goat,[2] before going down into the well of sin, take thought that the return will not be easy.

Remedies against certain special vices, and first against lust[1]

So far we have pointed out, as well as we could, the common remedies against vice in general. Now we will attempt to pass on specific recommendations concerning what means should be adopted to combat each vice, especially lust, the evil which is the first to assail us, presses the attack more violently, is more widespread, and drags greater numbers to perdition than any other. Therefore if foul lust shall ever excite your senses, remember to counter it immediately with these weapons.

In the first place consider how unclean, how filthy, how unworthy of any man is that vice which equates us, made of divine substance, not only with cattle, but even with pigs, goats, dogs, and the most brutish of the brute animals. Indeed it casts us down to the condition of beasts when we were destined to the fellowship of the angels and communion with divinity. Call to mind how momentary it is, how deceitful, and how it always contains more aloes than honey.[2] In contrast, what a noble thing is the soul, how sacred the body of man, as we have shown in preceding rules. What madness, therefore, for the tiniest and lowliest titillation of a momentary pleasure, to defile at the same time both soul and body unworthily, to profane the temple that Christ consecrated with his own blood.[3] Consider also what a long train of evils this seductive pestilence brings with it. Above all it takes away one's good reputation, our most precious possession. The report of no other vice has such a foul odour as that of lust. It exhausts one's patrimony; it destroys physical strength and beauty. It gravely harms one's health; it brings forth countless and loathsome diseases. It disfigures the flower of youth before its time; it hastens on ugly old age. It takes away the vigour of intelligence, dulls the sharpness of the mind, and introduces in us instead the mind of a beast. It calls us away irrevocably from all honourable pursuits and immerses man from head to foot in the muck, with the result that he likes to think of nothing but what is sordid, lowly, and filthy. And it deprives man of his peculiar possession, the use of reason. It renders adolescence unhealthy and disgraceful, and old age hateful, hideous, and miserable. Be sensible, therefore, and rehearse things in your mind, item by item: 'Such and such a sensual gratification had such dire consequences, brought me so much harm, so much disgrace, weariness, trouble, and sickness, and shall I be stupid enough to swallow the hook again wittingly?[4] Shall I commit this act again, which I shall have to regret once more?'

Similarly, repress your desires in reaction to the example of others[5] who you know have followed after pleasure to their own debasement and misery. From the opposite point of view, encourage yourself to continence by the example of so many young men and so many tender virgins, and after comparing your condition and theirs, reproach yourself for your faintheartedness. How is it that you are less capable of doing what this person and that person of that sex, of that age, with that background of birth and education were able and are able to do? Love the way they do, and you will be no less strong. Consider how good, pleasant, and fair a thing is purity of body and soul. This it is that makes us most closely associated with the angels[6] and vessels of the Holy Spirit. There is no other vice from which that Spirit, the lover of purity, more recoils than that of impurity; there is no place where he finds such peace and delight as in virgin minds. Set before your eyes how unseemly, how totally insane it is to love, grow pale, waste away, shed tears, caress, and be the base suppliant of a stinking whore; to break into song before her door at night, to be at the beck and call of a mistress, to suffer the rule of an insignificant woman, to expostulate, to become angry, to return to favour again, and to offer yourself willingly to be ridiculed, beaten, mutilated, and despoiled by a mere harlot. Where, I ask you, among all this is the name of manhood? Where is any trait of virility? Where is that noble spirit born for glorious exploits?

Consider, too, what a troupe of misfortunes sensual pleasure usually brings with it, once it has gained a foothold. In the case of other vices there is perhaps some connection with certain virtues; with lust there is none, but it is always coupled with numerous deadly vices. To be sure, it may be a trivial matter to consort with prostitutes, but it is a grave matter to disobey one's parents, desert one's friends, squander one's substance, make off with someone else's possessions, swear falsely, carouse, rob, become a criminal, fight to the last blood, commit murder, blaspheme – into all these and worse crimes will Mistress Pleasure carry you headlong, when once you cease to belong to yourself and stretch out your miserable neck to her noose. Ponder therefore how this life is more ephemeral than smoke, emptier than a shadow,[7] and how many snares death lays for us, plotting at every moment and in every place. At this point it might be useful to recall by name all your former acquaintances, intimate friends, those of your own age or younger, especially those who were once companions of yours in the pursuit of base pleasure, who were seized by sudden death, and let this experience of others make you the wiser. Think of how sweet were their lives but how bitter their death, how late they showed good sense, how late they began to hate their fatal pleasures. Call to mind the severity of the last judgment and the fearsome lightning bolt of that inexorable sentence that will hurl the impious into everlasting fire,[8] and that this pleasure of an hour, so short-lived and so tenuous, must be expiated by eternal sufferings. Then examine carefully the two pans of the scales, and note how uneven is the exchange. For an ignoble and momentary desire you must lose both the much sweeter and superior joy of the soul in this life and be defrauded of the everlasting joys of the future life, and, in addition, purchase never-ending torments for such an attenuated pleasure.

If it still seems hard to you to have contempt for this tiny bit of pleasure for the sake of Christ, remember what sufferings he underwent for love of you. Besides the ordinary indignities of human life, how much of his sacred blood he shed for you, how ignominious and cruel a death he suffered to redeem you! And yet unmindful of all this, do you crucify the Son of God again,[9] repeating those insane pleasures, which drove your Head and Lord to such dreadful suffering? Then recall according to a previous rule how many benefits he heaped upon you although you had merited none of them.[10] For all of these blessings which could never be adequately repaid, he asks nothing in return save that after his example you keep your mind from fatal allurements and turn it to the love of the sovereign good and the most perfect beauty. Compare the two Venuses and the two Cupids of Plato,[11] that is, honourable love and base love, godly pleasure and base pleasure; compare the disparate composition of each, compare their natures and their rewards. And in every temptation, especially when you are instigated to lust, set before your eyes your guardian angel,[12] the constant spectator and witness of all that you do and think; reflect that God observes you,[13] to whose eyes all things are exposed, who sits above the heavens and sees to the bottom of the abyss. And this foul deed that you would be ashamed to perform before a contemptible mortal you have no fear of accomplishing before the angel who is always by your side and in the presence of God and the whole chorus of heavenly beings who look on in abhorrence?[14] The fact is that even if your eyes were more penetrating than those of Lynceus,[15] more than those of an eagle, nevertheless even in the clearest light what a man does right before your eyes would not be seen with more clarity than the most hidden recesses of your mind are perfectly visible in the sight of God and the angels.

Make this consideration as well. When you surrender to lust, one of two things will result. Either once you have had a taste of sensual pleasure it will so beguile and becloud your mind that you will go from one vile deed to another until, completely blinded, your senses will become so numbed and hardened in evil that you will not be able to abandon base pleasure even when it has abandoned you. We see this verified in the majority of cases. Their bodies worn out, their beauty vanished, their blood gone cold, their strength failing, their eyes shrouded in mist, they are still unceasingly consumed by sexual desire, and their foul talk is more abominable than their former depravity. What could be more accursed or more monstrous? The other contingency is that if it is your fortune to come to your senses through the singular favour of God, with great mental anguish, unremitting effort, and many tears, that brief and fleeting pleasure must be atoned for. How much more prudent is it, therefore, not to give entrance to the virus of carnal pleasure than to be led into such deplorable blindness or pay the penalty of this insignificant and false bit of pleasure with so much suffering!

One can introduce many factors from a person's station in life that may be able to turn him away from sensual pleasures. If you are a priest, bear in mind that you have been totally consecrated to the celebration of divine rites. What a shocking outrage it would be that the mouth in which you consume that adorable body should come into physical contact with the stinking flesh of a harlot and that those same hands with which you perform that ineffable mystery with angels in attendance should handle loathsome filth. How unseemly it is to be made one body and one spirit with God and to be made one body with a prostitute.[16] If you are a learned man, the more noble and like to God a mind is, the more undeserving it is of this indignity. If you are a nobleman or a prince, the more visible the disgraceful conduct, the graver the scandal. If you are married, consider how worthy of respect is an unsullied marriage-bed[17] and make every effort possible that your marriage imitate the hallowed wedding of Christ and the church,[18] of which your marriage is a reflection, and therefore should be as free as possible of all immorality and filled with fecundity. In no state of life is it not a most base thing to serve lust. If you are young, exercise all care that you do not rashly defile the flower of youth, which will never return. Do not waste in the most hideous vice those best and truly golden years, which flee rapidly, never to return. Do not commit a wrong now through the ignorance and thoughtlessness of youth that will gnaw at you for the rest of your life through the remorse of conscience and the bitter pangs that pleasure leaves behind in our minds as it flees from sight. If you are a woman, nothing becomes this sex more than modesty. If a man, then so much the more worthy of greater things and unworthy of such frivolities. If you are an old man, pray that you may have another's eyes to see how sensual pleasure is unbecoming to you. If it is something to be pitied and repressed in young men, in an old man it is truly monstrous and utterly ridiculous in the eyes of those who vow themselves to pleasure. Among all the monstrosities of life there is nothing more grotesque than an old man's lust. O you senseless creature, forgetful of who you are, at least look at yourself in the mirror and see the grey hairs and snow on your head, your brow furrowed with wrinkles, your face like that of a cadaver and, now that you are nearing the coffin, attend to other things more fitting to your years. What reason should have prompted you to do, do now at least when your years admonish it or rather compel you to it. Pleasure itself repudiates you now, saying: 'I am no longer becoming to you, nor you suitable to me.' You have amused yourself enough, you have eaten and drunk enough. It is time for you to take leave. Why do you still squeeze out the last joys of life when life is already deserting you? It is time now that at long last that mystical concubine Abisag begin to recline on your breast.[19] With her holy fervour may she warm your mind, make warm your freezing limbs in her embraces.

EPILOGUE OF REMEDIES AGAINST THE STIMULUS OF LUST

To sum it all up briefly, these are the chief remedies that will safeguard you from the allurements of the flesh. First, a prudent and careful fleeing of all occasions. Although this precept should be observed in all other things as well, because he who loves danger deserves to perish in it,[20] nevertheless these especially are the Sirens that hardly anyone has escaped, except those who fled far away.

Next, moderation in food and drink and sleep, restraint even in licit pleasures, meditation on your own death, and contemplation of the death of Christ. It will be helpful if you associate with chaste and virtuous persons, avoid like the plague the conversation of corrupt and soft-living men, flee idle solitude and slothful inactivity, and instead exercise your mind diligently in the contemplation of heavenly things and in noble pursuits. But above all, dedicate yourself with all your heart to the study of the sacred Scriptures and pray frequently and with a pure mind, especially when temptation assails you.

Against the promptings of avarice

If you sense that you are either inclined by nature or instigated by the devil to the vice of the love of money, remember from previous rules the dignity of your condition, and that you were born and redeemed for one thing only, to enjoy forever the sovereign good. God fashioned this whole contrivance of the world so that everything would serve your needs. How ignoble, then, and how narrow-minded not to use but merely to be captivated by mute and worthless objects. Take away man's obsession and what are gold and silver but red and white earth? What none of the pagan philosophers failed to despise,[1] will you, a disciple of the poor Christ, called to a far greater possession, admire as something of great value? It is a noble thing not to possess riches but to despise them. But the crowd of those who are Christians in name only will cry out to me, and take pleasure in subtly deceiving themselves. 'Necessity itself,' they say, 'urges us to accumulate possessions, for if we had none, we could not live; if they are meagre, one lives too uncomfortably, but if they are more sumptuous and plentiful, they bring many more advantages. One can look after one's health, provide for one's children, be at the disposition of one's friends, be saved from contempt, and in general have a better reputation when one is well off.' Out of several thousand Christians you will scarcely find one or two who would not agree with these sentiments in word and opinion.

But to give an answer to both of these objections, first, as to their disguising their greed with the name of necessity, I shall counter with the gospel parable about the lilies and the birds that live only for the day,[2] to whose imitation Christ exhorts us. I shall respond that Christ did not allow his disciples to carry a purse or a bag.[3] I shall respond that he orders us to leave everything and to seek first the kingdom of God, and he promises that all these things will be given to us in addition.[4] When was it that the necessities of life were ever lacking to those who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to piety? How little, in truth, does nature require of us! But you do not measure necessity by the needs of nature, but by the bounds of cupidity. For the pious even what is insufficient for nature is enough. At the same time I have no great admiration for those who abandon their whole fortune all at once so that they can shamelessly beg what belongs to another. There is nothing wrong with possessing money, but the worship of money is allied to vice. If you have it in abundance, discharge the duty of a good administrator. But if it is taken away, do not be tormented as if you had been despoiled of a great possession, but be glad that you have been relieved of a dangerous burden. One whose greatest ambition in life is the accumulation of riches, who makes them a matter of great concern, much to be sought after, and stores them up for the distant future until the old age of Nestor,[5] such a man may perhaps well be called a good merchant, but it would not be right to call him a Christian, since he relies entirely upon himself and has no confidence in the promises of Christ. If his goodness generously feeds and clothes sparrows, will it desert the pious man who trusts in him?

Let us now give an account of the advantages that riches are believed to bring with them. First of all, by common consent of the pagan philosophers riches occupy the last place among useful goods. And although according to the division made by Epictetus,[6] with the exception of the virtue of the soul alone, all else is outside man, yet there is nothing so outside us as money, and nothing brings so little utility. Suppose you possessed all the gold and all the jewels in the world, your mind would not be one whit better, more prudent, or more learned, would it? Would the health of your body be more flourishing? Would it make you stronger, more handsome, younger? 'But,' you will say, 'money provides pleasures.' True, but fatal pleasures. Do you say that it procures honour? But what kind of honour, I ask you? Surely, that false honour bestowed by those who admire only what is fatuous and whose praise is tantamount to blame. True honour is to be praised by those who have merited praise themselves; the highest honour is to have pleased Christ. True honour is the reward not of wealth, but of virtue. The common people give place to you and look up to you. Fool, they admire your garments, not you. Why do you not descend into yourself and contemplate the miserable poverty of your mind? If the common crowd were to see it, they would declare you as pitiful as they now proclaim you fortunate. But you say that riches procure friends. I agree, but false friends, and it does not acquire them for you but for itself. Indeed on this account the rich man is all the more unfortunate, because he cannot distinguish true friends. One secretly hates him, thinking him to be niggardly. Another envies him because he is more wealthy. Another flatters him, looking to his own advantage, and fawns over him so that he can gnaw away at him. The one who publicly shows him most affection prays for his early death. There is no one who loves him so much that he would not prefer him dead rather than alive. There is no one who is such a close friend as to tell him the truth. Even granted that there were someone who sincerely loved the rich man, he must hold everyone in suspicion. He regards them all as vultures hovering over the corpse with their beaks open or flies buzzing about in search of their own profit. Therefore whatever advantage riches seem to bring is counterfeit, illusory, and deceitful. The fact is that they bring a great number of evils and take away a great number of blessings. If you reckon up the account of debits and credits, you will find that they never bring so many advantages that these are not outweighed by disadvantages. With what painful toil are they acquired, with what peril and anxiety are they preserved, with what sorrow are they lost! For which reason Christ calls them thorns,[7] because they tear to pieces with a thousand cares all tranquillity of mind, in comparison with which nothing is sweeter to man. They never satisfy man's thirst for them, but stimulate it more and more, and drive man headlong into crime. In vain will you delude yourself with these words: 'Nothing prevents me from being rich and pious at the same time.' Remember the words of Truth: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.'[8] St Jerome's words are very true in this regard, that a rich man is either the son or the heir of an unjust proprietor.[9] Immense wealth is never acquired or preserved without sin. Think of what better riches these riches will deprive you. Whoever is an admirer of gold hates a natural tendency toward virtue, and hates honourable occupations. Moreover, only the vice of avarice is called idolatry by Paul,[10] and there is no other vice with which Christ is less in agreement. You cannot serve both God and mammon.[11]

EPILOGUE OF REMEDIES AGAINST THE VICE OF AVARICE

Therefore, you will cease to admire money if you carefully weigh true good against false, specious advantages against real disadvantages; if you learn to contemplate and love the sovereign good, which, if it is present, even if all else is lacking, amply fills the spirit of man and which has such capacity that it could not be satisfied by all the goods of this world; if you frequently reflect in what condition you were at birth when the earth first received you, and in what condition you will be at death when it receives you again; if you will put before your mind the image of that fool in the gospel to whom it was said: 'This night they require your soul of you, and these things that you have amassed, whose will they be?';[12] if you will turn your mind from the depraved morals of the mob to the poverty of Mary, the apostles, the martyrs, and especially of Christ your Head, and resolve that you must fear that terrible condemnation with which he threatened the rich of this world.[13]

Against ambition

If ever ambition tempts your mind with its charms, strengthen it in advance with these remedies. Immediately, according to the principles given above, hold fast to the conviction that the only true honour is that which proceeds from virtue, and even that must be avoided at times, as Christ Jesus has taught us by word and by example. The only honour to be sought after by a Christian is to be praised not by men, but by God. For it is he whom God commends who in the end is of proven worth, as the Apostle says.[1] If honour is conferred by man for something dishonourable, especially by base individuals, this is not honour, but disgrace. If it is given for something that is by nature indifferent,[2] such as beauty, strength, wealth, or family, then it cannot rightly be called honour. No one earns honour for something for which he does not deserve to be praised. If it is given for an honourable accomplishment then it is honour, but he who merits it will not seek after it, content merely with virtue itself and with the consciousness of doing good.

See, therefore, how utterly absurd are those honours which make the multitude burn with desire. In the first place, by whom are they given? Obviously by those who do not know how to distinguish between what is honourable and what is not. For what reason? Often for things that are neither good nor bad, sometimes for base motives. To whom? To someone who is unworthy of them. Whoever shows honour to you either does so out of fear, and in that case he is to be feared in turn; or that you may be of use to him, and then he is making fun of you; or because he admires things that are of no account and not worthy of honour, and therefore he is to be pitied; or because he thinks that you are endowed with qualities deserving of honour. If his judgment is false, take care that you become what he esteems you to be. If true, then refer all your honour to him to whom you owe those qualities that have won you honour. It is no more fitting to attribute honour to yourself than it is to attribute virtue to yourself. Besides, what is more foolish than to measure your worth by the opinion of some mere men? It is in their power, when they wish, to take away again this bit of honour they bestow upon you, and dishonour you after having just honoured you. Therefore there is nothing more foolish than to be elated when these honours come your way or to snarl in anger when they are withdrawn. You will know that they are not true by this proof, that you share them in common with the most villainous and criminal of men. Indeed they fall to none more abundantly than to those who are least worthy of true honours.

Contemplate what happy tranquillity there is in a modest and private life, far removed from all the tumult of pride. By contrast, how thorny and full of cares, dangers, and sorrows is the life of the powerful. How difficult it is not to forget one's own interests in times of prosperity; how difficult not to fall when one is standing on a slippery slope; how fatal is the fall from on high. All honour entails great onus. How severe will be the judgment of the supreme judge against those who here below put themselves before others in the appropriation of honours. Mercy will come to the aid of him who has lowered himself, as to a little child.[3] But whoever raises himself up to call attention to himself cuts himself off from the assistance of grace. May the example of Christ your Head remain always fixed in your heart. What is more ignoble, more despised, more dishonoured than he in the eyes of the world? How he fled honours even when they were offered to him, he who was above any honour![4] How he derided them, as when he sat upon an ass![5] How he condemned them when he was clothed with a cloak and crowned with thorns![6] How inglorious a death he chose! But he who was despised by the world was glorified by the Father.[7] Let your glory be in the cross of Christ,[8] in which is also your salvation. What good are human honours if God rejects and despises you and the angels curse you?

Against haughtiness and arrogance of mind

You will not be puffed up with pride if according to that well-worn proverb you know yourself, that is, if there is anything in you that is great, beautiful, or outstanding, you consider it a gift of God[1] and not a good that belongs to you; and on the other hand, if there is anything lowly, sordid, or debased, you attribute it entirely to yourself alone. If you remember in what uncleanness you were conceived and born, how helpless, how destitute, how brutish, and how pitiful you were when you crawled forth into the light of day; to how many diseases, dangers, and sufferings this tiny body was exposed on every side, and how little a thing can suddenly prostrate this enormous giant, puffed up with immense pride. Think over what it is that makes you so complacent with yourself. If it is something neither good nor bad, your complacence amounts to stupidity; if it is something base, then it is madness; if something good, then it is ingratitude. Remember that there is no more certain proof of stupidity and foolishness than if one is immoderately pleased with himself. Moreover, there is no more deplorable kind of stupidity. If your mind is puffed up with pride because some insignificant little man submits himself to you, think how much greater God is, and with how much more power he stands over your head, he who crushes every proud neck and reduces the hills to plains,[2] and who did not spare even the angel who was guilty of pride.[3]

It will also be profitable though of less consequence to compare yourself with those who are better than you. You are pleased with your physical appearance; compare yourself with those who surpass you in beauty. Your head is swollen because of your learning; turn your glance towards those in comparison with whom you seem to have learned nothing. Then, if you consider not how many good qualities you possess but how many you are lacking and if with Paul,[4] forgetful of what lies behind, you stretch on to what lies ahead. It would not be unwise, either, if when the wind of pride blows upon us, we turn our evils into a cure, as if repelling poison with poison. This can be done if we recall some conspicuous physical defect, or some single disadvantage, which came about either by chance or through our own stupidity and which causes us great distress, and, placing this before our eyes, like the peacock,[5] we contemplate that part of us which is most uncomely. In this way our crest will fall immediately.

Add to this the fact that no other vice is more hateful to God, and among men arrogance is everywhere the object of hatred and ridicule, while on the other hand modesty both wins divine favour and attracts men's good will. Therefore, to sum up, there are two principal deterrents to pride: the thought of what you are of yourself, putrefaction in your birth, a mere bubble[6] in your lifetime, the food of worms in death, and, in the second place, what Christ became for you.

Against anger and the desire for revenge[1]

When violent resentment incites you to vengeance, remember that there is nothing more unlike to anger than what it falsely imitates, namely, courage. There is nothing so womanish, nothing so typical of a weak and grovelling mind as to take pleasure in revenge. You are eager to appear courageous in that you do not allow an injury to go unavenged, but in this way you betray your childishness, since you cannot control your feelings, which is the mark of a true man. How much more courageous and noble it is to despise another's stupidity than to imitate it. 'But he has done me harm; he is arrogant; he insults me.' The more wicked he is, the more you must take care not to be like him. What in heaven's name is this madness, that to avenge another's shamelessness you become more shameless than he! If you treat outrage with contempt, all will know that you were unworthy of it. But if you are moved to anger, you will give the offender more justification for his offence.

Then you must consider this fact, that if any harm has been received, it is not removed by revenge, but propagated further. What limit will there be to mutual injuries if everyone in a spirit of vengeance should continue to requite offences received? The enmities on both sides increase, the rancour continues, made the more incurable the more inveterate it is. But by gentleness and tolerance sometimes the one who procured the injury is cured, and, returning to his senses, from an enemy he becomes the surest of friends. By vengeance, on the contrary, the very evil which you wish to drive away moves back upon you with increased interest.

Another not ineffective remedy against anger is to reflect, according to the division I gave above [page 91 above], that no man can harm another if the latter does not will it himself, except in those matters which are extrinsic to man and do not pertain very much to man himself. In fact, God alone can take away the true blessings of the soul, which he usually does only to the ungrateful, and God alone can grant them, which he does not usually do with cruel and violent men. No Christian, therefore, is harmed by anyone but himself, and injury harms no one but its author.[2]

These considerations also, though less valid, will help you not to give in to mental distress. If you make a collection of relevant circumstances, as taught by the rhetoricians, you will be able both to attenuate the harm you have suffered and regard the injury done by another to you as less grave in somewhat the following manner: he harmed you, but the harm will be easily repaired; he is a boy with no experience, a young man, a woman; he did it at someone else's instigation; he did it unintentionally; he was drunk, and therefore it is right that I pardon him. Or, on other grounds: he did me grave harm, but he is my father, my brother, my teacher, friend, wife. It is just to pardon such an injury in consideration of the affection or authority of the offender. Or, squaring the accounts, you will balance his offence by his other good deeds towards you or by your offences against him. He did you harm, but on other occasions how often he benefited you. It is characteristic of an ungenerous spirit to forget kind deeds and remember minor wrongs. On this occasion he offended me; but how often was he offended by me. I shall pardon him so that by my example he will also pardon me when I do wrong.

Another much more effective remedy would be to examine within yourself, when a man sins against you, what sins you committed against God, how many and how often, and on how many counts you are answerable to him. God will pardon you in the same degree as you pardon your brother.[3] Our heavenly creditor taught us the method of paying our debts. He will not reject the law that he himself established. To be absolved from guilt you run off to Rome, you sail to the shrine of St James,[4] you buy huge indulgences. For my part I do not condemn what you do, but no matter what you do, there is no more fitting way by which you can be reconciled to God after your sin than by reconciling yourself to your brother when you have suffered wrong from him.[5] Forgive your neighbour a slight fault (for all sins of man against man are slight) so that Christ will forgive you your countless thousands of faults. 'But it is hard' you say, 'to subdue a raging spirit.' Does it not occur to you that Christ endured much harder things for you? What were you when he paid his precious life for you? Were you not his enemy?[6] With what leniency does he daily tolerate your repetitions of the same wrongdoings? Finally, with what mildness did he endure insults, chains, blows, and at the end the most ignominious death? Why do you boast of the Head, if you have no desire to belong to the body? You will not be a member of Christ if you do not follow in the footsteps of Christ. 'But he is not worthy of being forgiven.' Were you worthy that God pardoned you? As regards yourself you wish to experience mercy, but against your brother you wish to exercise severe justice? Is it a great thing that you, a sinner, should pardon another sinner, when Christ prayed to his Father for those who crucified him?[7] Is it difficult not to strike your brother in return, when you are commanded even to love him? Is it difficult not to return evil, measure for measure, to one to whom if you do not do good in return, you will not be to him, your fellow servant, what Christ was to one who was his servant? Moreover, if he is unworthy that you render a good deed for his evil deed, you are worthy to perform this deed, and Christ, for whom it is done, is worthy of it. 'But by tolerating one injury I invite another; he will repeat the injury if he gets away with this one with impunity.' If you can avoid the offence without incurring guilt, avoid it; if you can remedy it, remedy it; if you can repair it, repair it; if you can allay his savage rage, do so. But if not, let him perish alone rather than you and he both. If someone thinks he has caused you harm, think him worthy of compassion, not punishment. Do you wish your anger to be worthy of praise? Vent your anger on the vice, not the man. But the more you are inclined by nature to this vice, the more carefully you must fortify yourself beforehand, and engrave this resolve indelibly in your mind, never to say or do anything in anger. Do not trust yourself in anything when you are agitated. Be suspicious of anything which that violent impulse of the mind may dictate, even if it is good. Remember that there is no more difference between a madman and one who is in a fit of anger than there is between chronic and momentary madness.[8]

Call to mind how many things you said or did in anger which you regret, and which you now wish in vain could be changed. When your temper flares up, if you cannot immediately repress your anger, at least recover your senses to the degree that you remember that you are not sane. To remember that is already a sign of sanity. Make this reflection: 'This is the way I feel at the moment, but a little later I shall be in a different state of mind. Why should I say things against my friend in a fit of anger that I shall not be able to change afterwards when I have calmed down? Why should I do something now when I am beside myself that I shall greatly regret when I return to my senses? Why can reason or piety, or Christ himself not obtain from me what time will obtain a little later?' Nature has not given anyone, I think, such an amount of black bile that he cannot control himself to this degree. The best solution, however, is so to discipline your mind by precepts, reason, and habit that you will not be moved to anger at all. Perfection is reached when, having indignation only against vice, you replace insult by an act of charity.

Lastly, even ordinary self-control requires that you do not surrender yourself totally to your feelings. Not to be angry at all is to be most like to God and therefore most beautiful. To overcome evil with good[9] is to imitate the perfect charity of Christ. To curb one's anger and hold it in check is the mark of a sensible man. To indulge one's anger does not even belong to man, but to beasts, and indeed to wild beasts. But if you would like to know how terribly unbecoming it is for a man to be overcome with anger, make it a point, when you are mentally sound yourself, to look at the face of a man in a fit of anger, or when you are the victim of anger, look at yourself in the mirror. When your eyes are ablaze with fire, your cheeks pale, your mouth twisted, your lips frothing, your limbs trembling, your voice raging, your gestures wildly confused, who would think you were a man?

You see, my dear friend, what a vast sea of vices still remains to be discussed. But we will take in our sails in mid-course and leave the rest to your resourcefulness. It was not my intention – and, truly, what an unending task it would be – to continue as I began, to dissuade you from every vice in a series of declamations and exhort you to the opposite virtues. I merely wished, thinking that it would be sufficient, to show you the method and rules of a new kind of warfare, by which you might arm yourself against evils of your former life, which continue to sprout up again. Therefore, what I have done by way of example for this or that vice you should do for each vice, especially those to which you know you are particularly inclined either by a natural defect of character or by habit. Against these vices certain fixed resolutions should be inscribed in the album of the mind, and they should be frequently renewed, so that they will not fall into disuse. For example, against the vices of detraction, obscenity, jealousy, gluttony, and the rest. These are the sole enemies of the Christian soldier and the mind must be fortified well in advance against their attack by prayer, the sayings of wise men, the doctrines of Scripture, the example of pious men and especially of Christ.

Though I have no doubt that the reading of Scripture will bring you all these things in abundance, yet brotherly love inspired me to forward and assist your holy enterprise as well as I could by means of this small extempore treatise. I did so with all the more alacrity because I was somewhat afraid you might fall into the hands of that superstitious fraternity among the religious, who, partly pursuing their own personal interests, and partly out of great zeal but not according to knowledge scour land and sea,[10] and, whenever they find anyone abandoning wicked courses and returning to a saner and better life, immediately attempt to thrust him into a monastic order by means of the most impudent urging and threats and cajoleries, as if Christianity did not exist outside the monk's cowl;[11] and then, after filling his mind with mere quibbles and thorny problems that nobody could solve, they bind him to some petty observances, of human, not divine, origin, and plunge the poor fellow into a kind of Judaism,[12] teaching him how to tremble, not how to love. Being a monk is not a state of holiness but a way of life, which may be beneficial or not according to each person's physical and mental constitution. I personally do not urge you to adopt it, nor yet do I urge you against it. I merely advise you to identify piety not with diet, or dress, or any visible thing, but with what I have taught here. Associate with those in whom you have seen Christ's true image; otherwise, where there are none whose society can improve you, then withdraw from human intercourse as far as you can, and take for company the holy prophets and Christ and the apostles. Above all make Paul your special friend; him you should keep always in your pocket and 'ply with nightly and with daily hand,'[13] and finally learn by heart. I have been carefully preparing an interpretation of him for some time. Certainly it is a bold venture. None the less, relying on heaven's help, I shall earnestly try to ensure that, even after Origen and Ambrose and Augustine and all the commentators of more recent date, I may not appear to have undertaken this task without any justification or profit. Second, I shall try to cause certain malicious critics, who think it the height of piety to be ignorant of sound learning, to realize that, when in my youth I embraced the finer literature of the ancients and acquired, not without much midnight labour, a reasonable knowledge of the Greek as well as the Latin language, I did not aim at vain glory or childish self-gratification, but had long ago determined to adorn the Lord's temple, badly desecrated as it has been by the ignorance and barbarism of some, with treasures from other realms, as far as in me lay; treasures that could, moreover, inspire even men of superior intellect to love the Scriptures. But, putting aside this vast enterprise for just a few days, I have taken upon myself the task of pointing out to you, as with my finger, a short way to Christ. And I pray Jesus, who is the author, I trust, of this your purpose, that he may of his goodness vouchsafe to bless your virtuous undertaking; or rather may increase and fulfil his own good gift in converting you, that you may swiftly grow up in him and come to perfect manhood. Farewell in him, my brother and friend; you have always been beloved of my heart, but now are far dearer and more delightful to me than ever before.

Monastery of St Bertin, at Saint-Omer, 1501

This page intentionally left blank

ON DISDAINING THE WORLD

De contemptu mundi

translated and annotated by
ERIKA RUMMEL

De contemptu mundi was published in 1521[1] with the reluctant consent of the author. In a prefatory epistle to the reader Erasmus declared that he was yielding to the entreaties of his friends and the importunity of his publisher.[2] He had composed the treatise on disdaining the world 'when he was scarcely twenty,' on behalf of an acquaintance and to exercise his pen, never thinking that it would be published one day.[3] The jejune composition was an embarrassment to the mature scholar and he felt obliged to ask for the reader's indulgence. The piece, he said in his preface, had been written in a desultory manner and did not express his personal views on monasticism.[4]

De contemptu mundi takes the form of a hortatory epistle written by a certain Theodoricus of Haarlem in order to persuade his nephew Jodocus to enter a monastery. The names of writer and addressee are pseudonyms, and Erasmus chose not to disclose the identity of the man who commissioned the work because he was still among the living at the time of publication.[5]

The composition is divided into three parts. Chapters 1–7 deal with the topic of *contemptus mundi* proper. The writer exhorts his nephew to disdain wealth, carnal pleasures, and secular honours, and to meditate on the instability of human fortunes. The theme has a long literary tradition, and Erasmus' propositions contain little original thought. For the most part he follows a composition on the same subject by Eucherius, bishop of Lyon during the fifth century.[6] In the remaining passages he echoes thoughts and expressions found in Jerome's letters, in Innocent III's treatise *De miseria conditionis humanae*, Bernard of Clairvaux's *Meditatio de humana conditione*, and the *Rhythmus de contemptu mundi* ascribed to Anselm.[7]

Chapters 8–11 contain a eulogy of the monastic life which, according to the writer, brings spiritual freedom, pleasure, and peace of mind. There is some indication that Erasmus was reproducing here the arguments by which he himself was inveigled into joining an order. To prevail on the young Erasmus, his guardians recruited the help of Cornelis of Woerden, a comrade of Erasmus' from his childhood days and at the time a resident of the monastery at Steyn.[8] Cornelis, as Erasmus tells us with considerable resentment, was 'painting a wonderful word-picture of their regular life and building up their blessed peace and liberty and concord – in a word, it was to be fellowship with angels. Above all he repeated with emphasis what a supply of books there was and how much leisure time for study ... had you heard the man, you would have thought it must be no monastery but a garden of the Muses.'[9] This recollection of Cornelis' persuasive words could well serve as a summary of chapters 8–11 of *De contemptu mundi*. Only in the epilogue (chapter 12) did Erasmus speak his mind, warning young men not to enter monastic life rashly and to exercise caution in choosing the right order, since not all monastic communities lived up to their professed ideals.

This volteface, though unexpected, is not entirely at odds with the author's literary purpose, that of 'practice in writing.' The epistle was, after all, a rhetorical display or *epideixis,* a genre in which the ability to argue on both sides demonstrated the writer's skills. Indeed, the practice of adding a note of complaint or reproach to eulogies of the monastic life is not without precedent. We find that a number of patristic authors introduced criticism of corrupt practices into their praise of monastic ideals.[10]

Because the critical tone of chapter 12 stands in sharp contrast to the enthusiastic affirmation of monastic ideals in earlier chapters, a number of scholars have expressed the opinion that the section, as it stands now, could not have been part of the original composition.[11] Their supposition was confirmed in 1981 when Marcel Haverals discovered an early draft of *De contemptu,* written between 1502 and 1513, which lacks chapter 12.[12] At what point, then, was the final section added? A plausible answer is that it was added at the time of publication in 1521, but several points argue against such an assumption. First of all, Erasmus himself states in the preface that he changed but 'a word here and there,'[13] an expression that can hardly be extended to cover the introduction of significantly new material. Moreover, there are definite contextual and verbal resemblances between chapter 12 and other Erasmian compositions dating from the years 1503 to 1518: the *Enchiridion,*[14] the *Moria,*[15] and Epp 296, 447, and 858, written in 1514, 1516, and 1518 respectively. A comparison between some of the relevant passages will demonstrate the historical and verbal continuity of the views expressed in chapter 12 with these earlier works.

On those who take monastic vows early in life Erasmus says in chapter 12 (172 below) that they 'hurl themselves headlong into it as into a well / in hunc, velut puteum ... praecipitant sese.' The wording is reminiscent of Ep 447:58, where he describes them as 'having begun badly by plunging without a thought into the pit / se praecipitarunt in foveam.' In chapter 12 (173) he notes that 'each man is suited to a different kind of life / aliud vitae institutum aliis atque aliis magis congruit'; in Ep 447:60–1 he says: 'the same things are not suitable for everybody / non omnibus omnia congruunt.' He had used the same expression in Ep 296:17–18 (with changed word order). In chapter 12 he alleged that 'some are being pushed towards it [the monastic life] by unscrupulous parents and guardians who wish to rid themselves of expense and worry' (174). We find a similar autobiographical account in Ep 447:158–60: 'Their guardians ... opened discussions about the monastic life, partly to secure a more speedy release from their responsibilities.' 'They vigorously plot against the innocent young,' he says in chapter 12 (174): 'ii potissimum insidiantur aetati simplici.' He used similar words in Ep 447:31–2: 'They lie in wait for the innocence of young men and maidens /

insidiantur puerorum ac puellarum simplicitati.' On the decline of monasticism, Erasmus says in chapter 12: 'Once monasteries were nothing but solitary dwelling places for pious men ... harrowed by cruel persecutions ... to be a monk meant nothing more than to be a true Christian ... now most monasteries are in the midst of wordly affairs' (173). He expresses the same thoughts in much the same words in Ep 858:539–40, 545–7, 587–8: 'In ancient days the first origin of the monastic life was a retreat from the cruelty of those who worshipped idols ... it was the banding together of a few men aimed at nothing but a pure and simple Christianity ... Now men are called monks who spend all their time in the very heart of wordly business.' On the corrupt practices of his own time Erasmus said in chapter 12: 'Title and habit of a monk are nothing but a licence to do whatever they please with greater impunity ... many people embrace a religious profession for no other reason than to live in greater comfort, consulting the interests of their stomach' (173). We find similar expressions in Ep 447:59, 49–50: the monks of his day are 'escaping ... into licence to sin'; they are 'moved by ... a desire for idleness and good dinners.' In chapter 12 Erasmus notes that monks tend to have exaggerated notions of their worth: 'Many think they are second Antonys and Pauls' (174). This claim to fame is also found in the *Enchiridion* and in the *Moria* (CWE 27 135). Malicious monks are described in chapter 12 (174) as having minds that 'are sodden with hate and jealousy,' tongues that 'spout poison and injurious criticism,' and are said to be 'ill-humoured and intractable / cum toti madeant intus odio, livore; cum scateant obtrectatione ac virulentia linguae ... cum morosi sunt ac intractabiles.' Erasmus uses similar words in the *Enchiridion* (74): They are 'steeped in certain repulsive vices, difficult to get along with ... venomous in their speech / tristibus quibusdam vitiis madentes, in convictu morosos ... lingua virulentos.' On alternatives to monasticism, Erasmus says in chapter 12: 'Associate with men of integrity' (174). We find similar advice in the *Enchiridion*: 'Associate with those in whom you have seen Christ's true image' (127; Ep 164:35–6). In chapter 12 he counsels: 'Do not think that you lack any vows if you kept the vow you made to Christ in baptism' (175). The same thought is expressed in the *Enchiridion* as well as in Epp 296 and 858, as Erasmus asks 'what vow could be more holy or religious [than baptism]?' (58), characterizes baptism as 'the supreme religious obligation' (Ep 296:91–2), and asserts that 'we shall not greatly feel the lack of those three vows which are man's invention in someone who has kept in sincerity and purity that one great vow, which we took in our baptism, not to man but to Christ' (Ep 858:603–5).

The number of conceptual and even verbal similarities between chapter 12 and other Erasmian writings predating the publication of *De contemptu* suggests that the epilogue goes back to an earlier period. Indeed one is tempted to see in it the fragments or salient points of a *dissuasoria* on the same topic composed in 1506 but now lost.[16] Unless further evidence comes to light, however, it will remain a matter of speculation when chapter 12 was first written.

The epilogue, which adds a personal note to a perfunctory composition, is no doubt an expression of Erasmus' own convictions. Another element that asserts, in a subtle manner, the author's independence of thought is his innovative use of classical sources. Where conventional treatises on disdaining the world offer biblical references in support of the arguments advanced, Erasmus quotes classical literature. In a way his treatise is a comment on a question hotly debated in his time: whether or not pagan philosophy could be reconciled with Christian thought and, conjointly, whether or not classical rhetoric ought to be employed in Christian treatises.[17] Eucherius, Erasmus' model, represents the traditional side. He issued this challenge to students of secular literature: 'What precepts for living can they [pagan philosophers] give us? They do not know the purpose of life. They do not know God, and, diverging from the source of justice, they are drawn into erroneous ways of thinking in all other respects. The goal and end of such studies can only be vanity ... They are, as is written in Scripture, wise in the things of this world. It is quite clear from this that they do not know true justice, true wisdom.'[18]

Erasmus answered this challenge by quoting from the very sources rejected by Eucherius to illustrate the arguments advanced by him.[19] With its wealth of classical quotations *De contemptu* is a convincing demonstration of the appropriateness and applicability of pagan thought to a Christian theme. Considered in this light, Erasmus' protestations that the work was jejeune and unworthy of the new age sound excessively modest and self-effacing. Although his propositions were entirely traditional, his manner of argumentation was novel, and the treatise retained its poignancy twenty years after its conception, as its immediate popularity proved.[20]

ER

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM TO THE FAIR-MINDED READER, GREETING.[1]
I have often complained, gentle reader, of what I suffer from the zeal of my friends, who publish in my lifetime and against all my protests the most trifling pieces, which I threw off as a boy for practice in writing; nothing was further from my thoughts than that they should pass into circulation. And under this head I am the more unfortunate in that they come out in these days, when we are so much blessed,[2] and would have been much less exposed to public scorn had they been put out when they were first written. As it is, they are taken by their readers for the work of a man of some seniority, though I wrote them as a youth, and even so did not write them with this in view, and their readers belong to this age of ours, which is so rich in critics of exquisite taste.[3]

Long ago, when I was scarcely twenty, I yielded to the importunity of one Theodoricus,[4] who is still with us, and wrote for him a letter by which he hoped to persuade his nephew Jodocus to share his form of life. This was often copied and passed from hand to hand, and my name was attached to it, although I have no nephew called Jodocus. I wrote it against the grain and, as the piece itself proclaims, without much care, making play on the spur of the moment with commonplace reflections, for in those days I had no equipment of solid reading. Then the printers openly threatened that they would publish it unless I published it myself. I read it through again, changed a word here and there,[5] and allowed it to be entrusted to the press. In this way, I suppose, the time will come when I cease to have any love for my youthful effusions.

Farewell, dear reader, and if you read this book, read it in charity, and remember as you read that it was written against the grain.

ON DISDAINING THE WORLD

THEODORICUS OF HAARLEM TO HIS NEPHEW, THE LEARNED JODOCUS, GREETINGS

My dear young Jodocus, I have long felt a keen desire to write to you, but have kept silent until now out of modesty rather than indifference, that is to say, I was afraid, were I to tender advice to a man of your exceptional wisdom and learning (I who, after all, surpass you only a little in years and lag so far behind you in everything else) – were I to tender my advice I might seem to be carrying owls to Athens, as the proverb has it,[1] or timber to the forest.[2]

Of course I never doubted that you, kind and gentle-hearted as you are, would take my advice in good part, but I did not want to give the impression of acting like a conceited fellow by trying to give advice to one from whom I should more rightly accept it. What am I to do, then? Go ahead and write? Modesty forbids it. Keep my peace?[3] That, in turn, my love for you, dear Jodocus, will not permit. Will I remain forever undecided, then, on one side encouraged by love, on the other held back by modesty? No, nothing can be more irritating than being of two minds. It is decided then: may love triumph. May the better cause triumph: let modesty yield to love.[4] Your advantage, indeed your salvation, must carry more weight with me than other men's opinion of me. And if my dutiful address will be considered presumptuous rather than wise, my error will surely deserve pardon to the extent that it stems from manifest love (which does everything rashly) – for I would rather be too bold and write out of love, than too prudent and maintain a prudent silence. Nor do I fear for a moment that my patron will fail to obtain pardon for me – my love, I mean, which is neither simple nor ordinary, but twofold and exceptional. Indeed, we have formed a close bond for many and important reasons: the companionship we have enjoyed since the days of our childhood, a wonderful agreement of minds, our common pursuit of the noblest studies, the countless favours you have rendered me, and finally, the exceptional good will you and your family have shown toward me. To all this is added kinship by blood. Now, what relationship can be closer than that which is held together, so to speak, by twin chains:[5] the ties of blood on the one hand and a deep, mutual affection on the other? Be assured therefore, my dear Jodocus, that no one has ever felt greater love for himself than I feel for you. And since I love you as much as I love myself,[6] or even more, it is only proper that I should care no less for your welfare than for my own. Indeed true love somehow has the effect of making us grieve more bitterly for a friend's misfortune than for our own, of making a man love his friend more than himself. At least I hope that this describes your feelings, and I plainly declare that it describes my own.

It is from this love that I take my confidence and, forgetting modesty for the time being, write you this letter of exhortation, wishing by these means to draw you away from the din and dealings of this world[7] and bring you to the calm and solitude of monastic life. It is a difficult thing, of which one cannot readily persuade the crowd, but the integrity of your life is such that even now there is hardly anything secular about you except your manner of dress (a matter on which I congratulate myself) and since your noble heart directs you where my speech would call you, I am confident that my exhortation will not be in vain. For does anyone doubt that keeping on course is easiest for the ship that is carried on by favourable winds[8] and currents? But although your goodness rouses great hopes in me, I shall never cease to fear until you have bid farewell to this most unjust and dangerous world and have withdrawn to a monastery as to a safe harbour.[9]

Believe me, whenever I think of the dangers by which your life is surrounded (and I think about them almost constantly) my singular affection for you makes me anxious and worried and I suffer not unlike a fond mother whose only beloved son is sailing a strait notorious for its many shipwrecks. In tears, she sees a fierce storm brewing, grows pale, trembles, and frets. Unable to sleep she thinks of her son, and when she falls asleep she dreams of her son, always afraid of the worst, always overestimating the dangers[10] in her anxiety.

If only I do not underestimate the dangers you are in! I know them, dear Jodocus, I know them well, the stormy straits of this world, the perils of life, the many faces of death, for I barely escaped with my life, adrift on a narrow plank after my own ship was wrecked.[11] You may call me a coward in your blind confidence and urge me to take heart, but in this fashion you cannot deliver me of my fears – on the contrary, you add to them. Far from reassuring me, you all but shatter my hopes; for the more you are exposed to danger, the less you are aware of it. Or if you are aware of it, you do not heed it. Nothing can be more fatal, nothing madder than this kind of confidence.[12]

What could be more foolhardy than a sailor fearing no danger,[13] relaxing at the helm with a song and telling his passengers not to be alarmed while the ship takes its unsteady course between foam-crested rocks, raging tides,[14] gaping ocean waves, and savage storms? Who would not shudder at the man's boldness, who would not fear for his safety? I too will not cease to fear for you, my dear Jodocus, until you cease to sail boldly on the stormy sea of this world.

An absurd comparison, you will say. What does this world have to do with the sea, when the one is of all things the most beguiling, the other the most horrid? If you take the time to consider it more closely, I doubt that you will find a more appropriate comparison. Do you think that the sweet, but ruinous, songs of the Sirens,[15] who are said to lull those sailing by and drown them in the sea, do not aptly describe the alluring, but evil, blandishments of this world? If you could only see what snares, what traps, what nets are set out to capture your youth! Flee their shores (for flight is the safest course)![16] And do not take it lightly, thinking that you will sail unscathed where David and Solomon have suffered shipwreck,[17] not to mention others, too many and too well known to need listing here. Let me put the point briefly: Virtually no one escaped unless he took to flight. Ulysses,[18] according to Homer a model of wisdom and perfection, barely made his escape from the Sirens' song despite taking great care to stop his ears with wax and have himself tied to the mast with a rope. What hope, then, remains for you, when so many qualities have conspired all at once to ruin you: exuberant youth, enticing beauty, wealth, opportunity, and freedom? Day and night those monsters are singing their sweet song (too sweet, alas)!

Nor do I think you have less cause to fear those craggy rocks jutting out, I mean the highest ranks of secular office. If a violent storm drives you toward these rocks, you will be fortunate if, drifting on your narrow plank, you are cast up by the storm on some unknown shore. And what of the bottomless eddies of Charybdis[19] which are said to take hold of a ship, stay its course, turn it in circles with ever-quickening speed, and swallow it up? Does that not clearly represent greed? Greed harrowing the mind with its insatiable desire for possession,[20] never leaving a man in peace until he has been swallowed up and drowned in the abyss? And look upon the frenzied tides of the Syrtes[21] as representing the unrestrained force of anger which grows and builds up the more often it meets resistance. And what of the winds? Are they not a splendid image for the poisonous words of flatterers and slanderers? It matters little from what quarter they blow. One must fear either one: for if the winds are favourable, they drive the ship headlong into the jagged rocks; if they are opposing, they drive it into dangerous currents no less. And what is the meaning of that fearful rising and falling tide of waves, now soaring to the stars, now falling back upon themselves? How well they reflect the vicissitudes and turns of fortune, which often dash the mind and leave it shattered beyond endurance, not knowing how to suffer sudden calamity when just before it lived in bliss.

I will leave aside the tempests. I will say nothing of wandering off course in the night, of deceptive stars. I will not mention the thousand kinds of monster that the sea nourishes. With your lively imagination you will fill in the details and supply the appropriate interpretation. But you must not be trusting even when the calm sea invites you, when a glassy breeze has settled in, when fair skies smile on you,[22] for then a sudden storm may find you asleep. Indeed, I cannot think of anything more adverse, more harmful, more hostile to virtue than worldly success. For, as Scripture attests, disaster shatters many men, but many more are ruined by success.[23]

Beware, then, of putting your trust in the blandishments of this world lest (God forfend!) we come to lament you in the words of the poet, as you are floating on the waves, shipwrecked:

Too confident when sea and sky were calm,
O Palinurus, you will lie naked
Upon an unknown shore.[24]

2 / It is dangerous to remain in the world

Do you see what great dangers surround you, my dearest Jodocus, when even the calm sea is hazardous? What do I hear? You expect to rise above these dangers without suffering harm from any quarter, especially at an age which, by its own impulse, is carried headlong, or rather driven, toward vice by so many provocations? 'But I am hopeful,' you say. Very well, be hopeful then, and I will hope with you, yet I fear that our hopes may come to naught. I would like you to shore up our hopes a little, though I can easily guess what you will mumble to yourself as you read my words: 'And on the other side all is quite safe? Will monks alone be saved? And all the rest go to their doom?'[1] Not at all. I do not deny that there, too, are men whose names are marked in the Book of Life.[2] Nor do I say that by entering a monastery a man has immediately arranged his affairs so securely that he can live quite without concern. The difference between the two kinds of lives is as great as the difference between the man who is already sailing within the harbour though his ship is not yet moored and the man who is still borne along on the high seas;[3] or rather, it is the difference between swimming through the waves and making one's way on land. The man who remains in this world is not doomed, but he is in greater danger. Now, my dear Jodocus, because I wish you well and am perhaps more anxious for your well-being than you yourself, I bid you flee danger and seek safety. As the wise man says: He who loves danger will perish in it.[4] I ask you: why must you be tossed about by violent waves when you are free to choose a safer, more comfortable journey by land? Can anyone fail to see (unless he is purblind) that it is far safer, more pleasant, and more comfortable to journey without fear through lovely green meadows than to dwell in constant fear among so many visions of death? Have we reached such a pitch of blindness that we now find pleasure in our own troubles and (as Virgil has it)joyfully suffer monstrous labours?[5]

> Come hither, Jodocus, wherefore this sporting in the waves?
> Here is golden spring strewing the river banks
> With flowers of many hues; here above the cave
> A silver poplar sways; pliant the vines that weave
> Shady bowers. Oh come, leave the billowing waves
> Angrily pounding the shores. Here are liquid springs,
> Here are meadows so soft ... copses in leafy green,
> Here would I fain desire, life to spend with you.[6]

With these Virgilian verses I would call you away from those floods and lead you to our own delights. But the fatally tempting image of this world casts a spell on your eyes, I know not by what delusions of the mind, and eager though your heart is, the world detains and holds you back as if trapped by birdlime. For at once that painted face[7] of the material world rises up and calls you back with coaxing words even as you are about to depart. 'Fool,' she says, 'what are you doing? Why ruin yourself and your loved ones? Cruel man, are you thus deserting them all? If you despise your dearest companions and your many friends, have you no pity on your parents? And what do you think that wretched girl will suffer who loves you passionately, who is dying for you, who wants you for a husband? Consider and reconsider what you are about to do. You are too tender for such harsh resolve. Your youth, your handsome appearance are suited to very different matters. Fie upon you, will you allow the flower of your youth to be lost in this unworthy manner? Will you waste the time of youth alone and in unending grief?[8] Leave that to old men whose life has ceased to give them pleasure. You are but a boy and must spend your days in nothing but amusement.[9] At least consider that at home you have ample means that will grow ampler still if you remain at your post: this fortune is lost to you. Distinguished honours are yours now: more illustrious positions await you if you do not withdraw. All the world is seeking such honours – will you alone abandon them, desirable though they are? Are you taking your leave, never again to enjoy these pleasures, these riches, these conveniences here, and those there? Grant yourself time at least, grant a small delay: headlong desires have but bad results.'[10]

Have you heard them, those siren voices, have you heard them? For your own safety, beware of listening to them. Prove yourself a Ulysses! They will bewitch your mind if you lend an ear. They are sweet indeed, so sweet that they can move a heart of stone, but remember that they are fatal and will lead you to eternal death. Hither turn your ears, hither your eyes, hither your mind! Gather what strength is in you, be as shrewd as you can in marshalling the force of your mind. Do not flatter yourself with vain hopes, but look at things as they are, and you will see at once (if you see anything at all) how vile, how meaningless, indeed how unworthy of you, are those things that will not let you fly away.

3 / Spurn wealth!

What, I ask you, can the world offer you so valuable that for its sake you would allow your salvation to be endangered, that you would want to keep aloof from our delights? What, I ask, can the world offer you? Wealth in abundance? Yes, that is what mortals admire most. Yet there is nothing more wretched, nothing more elusive, nothing more ruinous than wealth, which is the teacher and handmaiden of all vice.[1] Not without reason does Scripture call desire the root of all evil.[2] It gives birth to a wicked desire for possession,[3] it gives rise to injustice, it sprouts factions, it is the origin of embezzlement, theft, sacrilege, robbery, and fraud. Desire spawns incest, gives birth to adultery, fosters rape, and nourishes mad passion and debauchery.[4] In short, what does the accursed hunger for gold not urge upon the human heart?[5] Do you recognize Horace's wisdom in calling desires the stuff from which the greatest evil is made and in wanting them thrown headlong into the sea if there be true repentance of crime (as he says)?[6]

So closely linked are vice and wealth in fact that even the words denoting them (*vitium* and *divitiae*)[7] seem to be somehow related. And can you show me one rich man who does not suffer from one of two diseases: from avarice, if he is by nature too money-minded (and there is nothing more grievous than avarice), or from self-indulgence, if he is a little too prodigal by nature (and there is nothing more disgusting than self-indulgence)? One is his money's slave rather than its master;[8] the other will not remain its master for very long. One does not possess but is possessed; the other will soon possess no more. One lives a mean life among great means;[9] the other does not use, but abuse, his money. Of this, I think, a certain Eutrapelus was well aware, for whenever someone by chance provoked him, he would get his revenge in the following manner, as we are told: he did not seek him out with abuse, poison, or sword, but added to his wealth by presenting him with expensive garments, for he thought – quite rightly – that wealth aroused a desire for more wealth, that desire for possession made a man forget his honour and drove him to all kinds of foul and disgraceful deeds.[10]

But let us assume that none of this will come to pass in your case, that you would indeed be a rare bird on earth, like to a black swan.[11] Yet, what attraction has this precious burden? It is acquired with difficulty and preserved with anxiety; its accumulation means hard labour, its protection anxious fear, its loss wretched suffering.[12] The rich man therefore knows no leisure: either he is keeping a keen watch over his possessions, or going eagerly about their acquisition, or grieving over their loss (and he considers it a loss whenever he has made no profit). And what if he has acquired a pile of gold as high as a mountain or higher, if that is possible? He has only increased his burden, piled up sorrows, gathered fears and troubles, and put himself on pitiful and laborious guard duty. Worries stalk his growing wealth.[13] His love for money grows as fast as his supply of money: the man who possesses nothing wants less.[14] In short, wretched is the watch over great treasures.[15] Vulteius, that character in Horace, thought his patron had done him a bad turn because his generosity had raised him from poverty. He thought he had been made wretched rather than rich and begged his patron to return him to his former way of life as soon as possible – he too deserves praise who comes to his senses in time![16] But the miser says: 'Money is sweet even if its management is a bother. I won't regret the trouble as long as my purse keeps getting fatter.' But tell me, most foolish of men (or should I say 'most pitiful'?), you, who never get enough, who keep your wealth shut up in an iron strong-box or, more cleverly, buried in the ground, you who brood over your treasure day and night[17] like the famous Hesperian serpent[18] over the golden apples – tell me, what purpose do you think your money serves? What value do you think it has? Money is nothing but metal stamped with portraits and titles. It cannot rid your mind of gnawing worries,[19] it cannot drive off, or protect your body from, illness and discomfort, much less death. 'Well,' you say, 'it guarantees that I shall not be in want.' You are deceiving yourself. It guarantees that you are always in want.[20] Just as drinking does not quench but whets the thirst of one suffering from dropsy,[21] so an abundance of possessions causes in you a growing desire for possessions. And anyone who asks for more makes it clear that he is in want.

Consider, moreover, how treacherous is the uncertain state of your possessions. All the wealth that you have gathered over such a long period of time, with such great effort, by hook or crook,[22] from every place – all your possessions will desert you instantly and be off to another if Fortune turns her wheel, as they say.[23] And you who, a little while ago, were more fortunate than Croesus,[24] will suddenly be a second Irus.[25] This truth is so manifest that I need not waste a great many words on it. How often can one see the public spectacle of men of royal wealth reduced to dire poverty? Even assuming a man's wealth is lasting and does not fail him during his lifetime – will it follow him after he has departed from life?[26] When your corpse is being lowered into the grave, you may take from your great wealth but one poor little shroud;[27] the rest has already found new masters. At that time good deeds stored up by you will be the only thing of value, the only thing that does not desert the departing master.[28]

All estates of this world, all the gold Tagus and Pactolus roll along in their glistening sands[29] should not be worth the risk, dearest Jodocus, of throwing away your salvation or brooking delay. Rather, if wealth pleases you that much, listen to the Lord's counsel and become truly wealthy:[30] store up a treasure in heaven where it will not be ruined either by rust or gnawing worms and where thieves cannot dig it up or steal it.[31] Consider nothing meaner than wealth abundant in coin but lacking in virtue. Consider nothing more unfortunate than the kind of gain that brings loss to the soul.[32] It is disgraceful, then, for a scholar and a Christian to pursue shamelessly, and at great risk to his salvation, what pagan philosophers did not find hard to spurn for the sake of learning or reputation.[33]

4 / Deadly and bitter are the pleasures of the flesh

Do sweet temptations capture your fancy? Indeed they are the most alluring mistresses.[1] With their deceptive beauty they have enslaved nearly all the world. Uncover their deceit, beware lest the false and artificial sleekness[2] of their skin seduce you. Consider what they are, not what they appear to be, and you will find nothing more repulsive, nothing more vulgar, nothing more beastly than desires. In nothing else do men approach the condition of brute beasts more closely than in their foul carnal desires – the more tempting, the more harmful. Most aptly therefore has our divine Plato called them the bait of evil;[3] for just as bait stuck on the end of a hook lures innocent fish, catching them who let themselves be caught, so pleasure, covering up its poison with honey,[4] attracts souls keen on this trove, infects them with poison once they have been attracted, and kills them mercilessly once they have been infected.

But, not to detain you any longer, hear the verdict of a philosopher who is a pagan though his thoughts are clearly worthy of a Christian. It occurs in Cicero[5] where Cato the Elder quotes the Pythagorean Architas, whom he had heard in Tarentum, saying that nature had given man no more fatal disease than the passion for pleasure. The burning desire for pleasure is aroused, grasping for control rashly without restraint. Hence (he used to say) countries are betrayed, governments overthrown, and secret parley held with the enemy. There is no crime, no monstrous plot whose undertaking has not been motivated by the desire for pleasure and, one may add, out of desire for pleasure arise poverty, loss of reputation, grave and foul diseases of the body, moral blindness of the soul, and contempt for the divine spirit; it is the beginning of all misery, it is the closing link of the chain by which men are dragged to eternal torture. Oh, bitter sweetness,[6] that is surrounded by so many afflictions! A great number precede it, the same number accompany it, but the largest number, and the most frightening kind, follow it.

A little while ago I said that in their desire for pleasure men approach the state of brute beasts, but now I see that in this matter animals are much better off than human beings; for whatever their desires, they indulge in them without paying a penalty, whereas man pays dearly (good God, how dearly!) for the brief and shameful gratification of his gullet and stomach.[7] You can see the nature of pleasure, even at its best (if one may use the term 'best' in this context). Now, why tell you about the rest of the world's follies (or shall I call them acts of madness)? Evil pleasures someone called them,[8] but in my opinion I shall not go wrong calling them 'mad pleasures.' What feasting there is, what guzzling and quaffing, what drunken nightly orgies, what dancing and hopping, what wanton play, what scurrilous, obscene joking, and a thousand other such activities – do they not seem to you like the laughter of madmen?[9] For who would not think a man completely out of his mind and raving mad if, being led out to be crucified or to die by the sword, he walked about among the weeping crowd joking, skipping, and laughing loudly? And yet, dear Jodocus, those men seem to me madder still, to the extent that spiritual death is more cruel than physical death. They count the days of their life among the good things, but at life's end they march down to hell.

Go now and, to serve the present needs of your brute and mortal flesh, desert your maker. To let your flesh live in sin, ruin your soul. To let it enjoy ephemeral pleasures, create eternal grief for yourself. But perhaps you have a lawful love and are thinking of taking a wife? I for one do not condemn marriage. I remember him who said: Better to marry than to burn.[10] Let this refuge stand open to the weak. I do not deny Segor (a great city, yet called small)[11] to those who are fleeing the conflagration of Sodom, but I know that your heart is stout. I approve of marriage, but only in the case of those who cannot live without it. Look up what St Jerome wrote about this topic, for he has written a great deal on it.[12] One thing only I shall whisper into your ear because we are friends, warning, begging, and beseeching you over and over again: Beware! Do not offer your mouth to the iron muzzle,[13] for once you have accepted it, you cannot easily shake it off. Marriage is no evil, I admit, but it certainly is an affliction.[14] The celibate man is not only much the better man, but in numerous aspects also the more fortunate.

5 / Positions of honour are meaningless and uncertain

Perhaps you take pleasure in illustrious titles and are fascinated by the splendour of high office? Of course; it is a splendid thing to carry your head high for all to see, as the famous poet says.[1] You enjoy having a thousand eyes trained on you as you give a speech.[2] You like to be sought out with deference, to be surrounded by dependents, to hear your name on everyone's lips, in a word: to be addressed as lord and master. But in truth, tell me, what do you see in those honours that are paid to you, a mere mortal, by other mortals partly because they want to flatter you, partly because they are afraid of you, partly because they hope for some advantage? Such honours are as false as they are fleeting.[3] What else but false, since they are conferred on the best and worst alike?[4] Consider true honours those that are derived from the glory of virtue. Embrace virtue, and honour will seek you out, even against your will. Just as the body casts a shadow that does not go away even if one tries to escape it yet cannot be grasped if one tries to catch it, so good deeds spontaneously bring honour, which the deserving man cannot avoid and the undeserving cannot obtain.

But what is more fleeting and uncertain than honour? To me all worldly goods seem fleeting and short-lived (for what could be called lasting in this world?), but nothing seems more uncertain and elusive than positions that yield the proudest and most splendid honours. And yet nothing is as troublesome to obtain. Like Sisyphus[5] you must, for a long time, roll your rock up a steep mountainside; you must be daring and commit deeds punishable by exile, jail, or even death on the cross, to become a man of note in the end. And while nothing is more difficult to obtain than fame and honour, nothing is easier to lose. How so? you ask. Because great honour is bound to cause great jealousy. Winds lambast the mountaintops: envy seeks out high office.[6] It always accompanies great and difficult accomplishments. Need I say more? The man who has drawn upon himself the jealous attention of many men, must needs have many enemies plotting against his life. And why? Because many go after what you alone possess, and since they have no hope of obtaining it while you are alive, they must get rid of you somehow. And when so many snares are set for you,[7] it is hard not to fall into one of them eventually. You face death by poison or by the sword or, at the very best, must ransom your life by going into exile. And even if you are exceptionally lucky, you are always worried and fearful of being overthrown, thus leading a brilliant but a hard life.

Can you now see the wisdom of Juvenal's words?

> He who sought honours in excess,
> Excessive wealth demanded, has but built
> Himself a lofty tower many-tiered
> Whence he will take a deeper plunge, a fall
> Of headlong and gigantic ruin.[8]

But why do I wax eloquent on this point? In order to make you see plainly, my dear Jodocus, that any greatness offered by this world is fraught with worries, fraught with concerns, and unstable at that. So much for the time when you are alive and well, but what happens when death – the most bitter fate of all – strikes? when the whole mirage of exalted offices disappears like dreams gone with your sleep?[9]

Where are the monarchs of old?[10] Where is that great Alexander, for whose ambitions the world was too small?[11] Where is the famous Xerxes, whose fleet covered and filled the ocean?[12] Where Hannibal,[13] victorious so often, whose cleverness, while he was alive, parted craggy mountains with vinegar? Paullus Aemilius, Julius Caesar, Pompey,[14] and the rest, the most famous Greek, Roman, and barbarian leaders whose names it would be tedious and idle to list one by one – where are they now? What is left of such grandeur and majesty? Nothing but feeble stories told by men.[15] And even for that they are indebted to the services of authors, for if they had not transmitted their names to posterity in their writings, these men would be so buried in oblivion that not even the slightest trace would remain of them today. And that, whatever its value, may have some significance for us, though it has none for them since they do not look upon things now as they did before.

Indeed, if Alexander, the greatest of all kings in memory, emerged from the underworld now and looked upon the world, burning as it is with ambition, I think he would laugh at the vain desires of ordinary men and, made wiser by experience, make a confession, using these or similar words:

'Where does the tide of blind error carry mortal men? No one shows regard for solid, substantial, profitable matters. What great effort they all expend on seeking what is harmful, meaningless, and unstable! Why do they make such persistent and tenacious efforts to be raised up to high heaven? Let them learn from my example, let them learn that all the honours bestowed by mortals are fleeting, much like a cloud, widespread and gone again within the same hour.[16] I, the very man who once easily surpassed all generals in splendour, who stood undefeated at the zenith of all things, who forced countless kings and barbarian nations into submission, who when the earth was fairly in his power explored the seas as well and finally sought out heaven – a fortunate man indeed if I could have frightened off death too. But death vanquished the man who had vanquished all, striking him down with a slight, trifling fever.[17] No soap-bubble can burst[18] more suddenly, no trail of smoke be gone with the wind more rapidly than dies away the sound and fury of things. Woe is me – how different am I all of a sudden, how changed from that Alexander whose edicts were once the terror of the whole world. Now even the lowest creature could treat me with contempt and harm me with impunity. Once the immeasurable expanse of the world fell short of my desire, now my body is contained within this narrow urn and in a space of seven feet.[19] Death alone declares how small and trifling are men's bodies.[20] Once I was renowned for my perfumed cloak,[21] my sparkling crown,[22] my robes of shining purple – now I am laid low, ugly even to the eye: bare bones and dry ashes. What purpose does my noble lineage serve now, what purpose my gilded records? What purpose the pyramids, work of toil, when I have neither sight nor feeling? Oh, that my soul had perished together with its body, before a death, sadder by far, followed upon the first demise. But, alas, the soul lives on, to its great detriment, compelled to suffer punishment for every day lived. Oh, thrice blessed those who in their lifetime convinced themselves of the truth, which we, taught by experience, too late have come to recognize. Wise men are they, wise men indeed who, content with their lot, strive to constrain themselves, to command themselves rather than others, and seek to gain that heavenly kingdom destined for eternity rather than this earthly one, which is doomed to fall. A great governor who governs himself well!'[23]

What speech can be more truly spoken? And whom would this speech, as sad as it is true, not deter from cherishing ambitions?

6 / Of the inevitability of death, which allows nothing to abide forever

I am going on at greater length than I ought to, especially in a matter that is clearer than daylight itself; for such is the state of affairs that the stories of old annalists, once considered fantastic tales, are now given credence by all, when the examples we see are more distressing than those we read in their books. But whenever the conversation turns to death, I am always puzzled by this question: Nothing is so much before our eyes as death – then why is nothing further from our minds?[1] Even our name – mortals – is taken from 'mortality,' so that we cannot hear our name pronounced even in a casual manner without our own ears reminding us of death. And yet we have no fear.

Why this lethargy? What confidence (or shall I call it 'madness') fills the human mind? Do we have such poor memory? Have we drunk so deeply from Lethe, the stream of oblivion (as they say),[2] that we cannot keep in our minds what presents itself constantly to our senses? Have we become insensitive like stones, that we are unmoved by what we have heard so often, seen so often before? Do we see even one survivor from ancient times? In our own time as well we observe that death spares no class of man. Our ancestors have passed away.[3] Cicero's words apply to them: They have lived.[4] All of us, indiscriminately, take the same course; posterity will follow in like manner. Thus, like a rapid stream,[5] we roll headlong toward our decline. Horace says: We are all herded to the same place; one night awaits all.[6] And sooner or later we must tread the road to death.[7] Many are the funerals, of old and young mingled. No one can escape the sight of dread Proserpina.[8] They fall on all sides, countless numbers of men, older ones, younger ones, contemporaries, friends and acquaintances, relatives, parents, and children – we are surrounded by a mass of dying men, doomed to die ourselves. We are born under the same law, the same destiny, yet we do not fear the same fate.

You are asking: 'Why bid me think of death already? I am in the prime of life. It will be a long time until the hair on my head turns grey and old men's wrinkles line my forehead.[9] Let those live in fear of death who are already burdened with years, who greet the earth with backs bent by age, their heads empty, their cheeks sagging, their eyes shrivelled and hollow, their noses forever dripping, their teeth scant and yellow; those who have outlived the crows[10] and are now counting the remaining years of their life on the fingers of their right hand. Far am I from being like them! The quickening blood still rushes to my heart.[11] My strong shoulders, my firm sides, my whole body as yet lively and full of vital juices gives me hopes for a long life.'

Very well, but tell me, what God has promised you white hair and old man's wrinkles? If you see only white-haired men being carried to their graves, live at ease and think no more about death until you are white-haired and wrinkled; but if death attacks all ages, if it strangles the unborn, keeping them rather than taking them from life, if it snatches infants from their mother's breast,[12] if it takes children and adolescents, if it carries off adults in their prime, and takes away old men, if it makes no distinction of sex, age, constitution, and appearance, will it exempt you alone? 'Tis true: an old man cannot live much longer, but you, a young man, may die soon. For him death is certain, for you survival is uncertain. No one is too old to stay alive another day,[13] no one so young that he can promise himself today's evening. And on careful observation you will find that many more men are buried young than die grey-haired. Old age has always been rare,[14] but never rarer or less respected than in our time. How many men can you point out today that have lived to a hundred years, not to ask for the likes of Titonus, Nestor, Sybil, or Methusalah![15] In fact, how many people nowadays live to see their sixtieth year?[16] Hardly one out of a thousand in all mankind. And is sixty years not a very short life span? Yet how few men do you know who have reached that age: so fragile, so uncertain, so exposed to accidents aplenty is man's life.

Do you want me to offer you a comparison, Jodocus, that is plain and fitting? Look upon a tree[17] flowering in early summer: luxuriant blooms cover it so completely that one can barely see the leaves, let alone the trunk. It promises fruit too plentiful to support. But of such an abundance of blossoms only a very few reach full bloom. One part is blighted by worms and spiders, another struck down by wind or rain. Then, when the surviving offspring (to use this expression) drop their petals, being blossoms no longer, one can see them gradually grow plump and take on the shape of fruit. But do they all last until they are ripe? Far from it. Many are eaten by worms, others struck down by storms, still others spoiled by excessive rain, a great many are damaged by some other pest and are ruined, so that from such a promise of plenty you will barely harvest any fruit. Man's life is attacked by no fewer calamities. One could name a thousand diseases, as many thousand chances of death, a thousand fatal ways, a thousand death traps[18] to cut off prematurely many more than are consumed by ripe old age. And since man's life is exposed to such and so many dangers, think, I beseech you, what madness it is to go on living as if we were never to die.[19] We worry about what does not concern us and neglect to make preparations to ready ourselves against the time of our death.

Imagine a king who is confronted by a deadly enemy but cannot tell how far away he is; he knows only one thing for sure: the enemy is hiding out not far away and will attack any time now, seizing the first opportunity offered. Will a king in such circumstances think about building baths, decorating a dining hall, or taking a wife? Will he not rather think about increasing the size of his army and raising a protective mound? Will he not think about guards, arms, and other military equipment that might enable him to destroy the enemy? Indeed, he will consider these matters the more carefully the less certain he is of the time and direction of the enemy's plotted attack. Yet death, the deadliest enemy of them all, is hatching plots everywhere, against every age, by a thousand means, while we (please God!) marvel at our silver, take care of our skin, and run for office.

If we kept in mind the uncertain promise of our treacherous age, if we kept death, which threatens us at all times, in mind at all times, we would pour into our own ears the words spoken by the famous prophet to the ailing king: Set your house in order, for you will die.[20] And at once all those evil delicacies would acquire a bitter taste, treasures would become cheap, honours mean. Thus the one thought of death would easily convince us to spurn all material things. For what purpose, miser, do you hoard up such a mountain of gold? Death is threatening, soon to snatch it all up. Why take so much baggage on this short journey?[21] Have you forgotten what happened to the foolish man in the gospel? When he rejoiced in having his granary full and expected great pleasures, he was told: 'Fool, tonight they will take your soul away from you, and then, who will be master of your possessions?'[22] And you, vainest of men, why are you pursuing mad pleasures with such impudence? Look over your shoulder: death is at hand, pressing close, soon to change those petty temptations into eternal tortures. Oh, vainglorious man, what ill-fated lust of power[23] has taken hold of you? Behold, death is at your doorstep, ready to dash you to the ground from the height of your glory; swooping up all your possessions and yourself like a swift-flowing whirlpool. Thus our dear Rudolph Agricola[24] wrote elegantly no less than truthfully: Death scatters all; what is born must die again. Only virtue knows no death, and good deeds abide.

Indeed what will remain except virtue alone, when you are hard pressed at the moment of your final destiny? When the warmth of blood and life itself leaves your pale limbs,[25] when a horrid pallor tinges your face, when eternal darkness veils your once lively eyes, when in the end cold stiffness grips your entire body, and the soul (wretched soul, for on her the whole weight of affairs rests now that she has been deserted!) is carried off to that austere and strict lawcourt – how will she plead each case when she must, on demand, render her account?[26] What, I ask, will be left of all your possessions, on whose acquisition you have wasted your whole life? Where can you ask for support? Where will you find a refuge, wretched man? Where, wretched man, will you find refuge? In your wealth? Wealth cannot assist you and, besides, has long since found other masters. Perhaps you will take refuge in your pleasures? But they are one with the body and perish together with the body. In the strength of your youth, then? But for each man death is his old age.[27] Will you find a refuge in the splendid grace of beauty which you once proudly used to win everyone's affection? Just as a rose withers when nicked by a finger,[28] so everthing plucked by death grows wan. Indeed 'wan' is not strong enough: everything becomes horrid. No one's love for the beauty of a living being can match the horror felt for a dead man's corpse. And will you find a refuge in your former glory? It, too, vanishes instantly together with life, as I have explained. Where will you find refuge, then? With the crowd of friends?[29] Like swallows at the end of summer,[30] some have flown away together with your good fortune; the rest, if any stayed behind, have no power to give you help. And how will it help you if they beat their breast in sorrow, if they tear their cheeks, if they turn all their blood into tears to shed at your funeral, if at last they go insane for your sake and join you in your death? They cannot save you: they can only bring misfortune upon themselves.

You will be wise therefore to remember your destiny before it is too late, and to acquire such goods as will protect you and allow you to await the judgment day with equanimity. Wealth, pleasure, fame, and whatever else *might seem sound and useful (but are of a very different nature)* are a burden, at least to the dying man. This is the time when virtue begins to be of use. As for worldly goods, even if they do not leave us, we must leave them.[31] Virtue alone will never cease to be our companion and protector.[32]

7 / The world is wretched and full of crime

Now you know, my dearest Jodocus, how false, how unstable, how deadly are the goods of this world (if they can rightly be called 'goods'). Now in turn hear a few words about its evils.

Once upon a time, when the world was in its prime[1] (so to speak) and flourishing, there was perhaps nothing wrong with feeling reluctant about being torn from it. But now, unless we purposely deceive ourselves, how can the world deceive us? Take each one of the disasters that have struck each century: today they strike us all at once. Wars, rebellions, poverty, destitution, childlessness, diseases, epidemics – what evil have we not seen invade our age?[2] I am now twenty-four years old and have seen no relief from the din of war during that whole time.[3] The warring factions remind us of Sulla's time.[4] Whichever side wins, the country loses and must pay the penalty, undeserved though it is. And how pitiful are the cases of poverty one can see: a great number of human beings living on fodder fit for animals, a great number dying of starvation. In times like these a man has to be a Croesus[5] to be able to provide even a scant fare for his family. Moreover, even if you yourself live in prosperity, everything is so rife with disaster that the sight of wretched men's misfortunes and the sound of their lamentations make you feel wretched as well. Moreover, the field of crime has yielded such a crop that we now far surpass that iron age about which it was sung a thousand years ago:

... the last age of hard iron is.
And now it fell into an age of metal worse:
All crime. True modesty and trust was put to flight,
And in their place came tricks and fraud and treachery
And violence and wretched love of ownership.
Man lived on robbery: host was not safe from guest,
Nor father-in-law from son, and brotherly love was rare.[6]

Today, however:

The ninth age takes it course, and 'tis a period worse
Than was the age of iron; for its crime Nature
Herself could find no name to give from metal drawn.
Now, if a friend acknowledges deposit made,
If he returns the old purse full with all its rust,
'Tis marvellous loyalty worthy of the Tuscan books,
And each man ought to sacrifice garlanded lambs.
Indeed, good men are hard to find, and scarcely match
The number of Theban gates, the mouths of wealthy Nile.[7]

What do you have in common with this world, if you are unwilling or not clever enough to forswear yourself, to cheat, to deceive, to rob? 'It's none of my business what kind of world this is,' you say, 'I myself care for truth and justice.' If you care for justice at all, part company with this world and as quickly as possible, for it has nothing in common with moral goodness.[8] Call me a liar if there is no truth in what that foremost champion of truth proclaims: The whole world is in the grasp of evil.[9] And do not delude yourself by saying: 'What others do concerns me not. I care only for my own soul.' Far off the mark! as the comic poet says.[10] It matters a great deal with whom you spend your life, Jodocus. For just as the diseases of the body are stealthily transmitted by contagion,[11] so the diseases of the soul creep in silently. Nothing is more lethal than bad company. Granted that you yourself cherish virtue – associate with a wicked companion and see if you can convert him to your own ways! More likely he will breathe his venom on you, rub off his scab on you,[12] and at length make you like himself, for we are inclined by nature toward the worse.[13] Then that proverb which is on everyone's lips will neatly fit the two of you: Birds of a feather flock together.[14]

'Who forces me to associate with a corrupt and wicked fellow?' you object. Don't you know? Your youth, the necessity of conducting your business, and a certain feeling of embarrassment, a mean feeling but often found in noble spirits, and finally, the very wickedness of your companions.

You are invited to a drinking party (to call it nothing worse): if you excuse yourself on account of business or for reasons of health, no one will believe you, even if you swear an oath. You will be thought niggardly or cheap. What can you do? To avoid the ugly stigma, you give in, of course. You visit a wine-cellar or an inn: young men sit next to young women.[15] I am expressing this in decent terms, being ashamed to speak of the kind of indecencies that they are often not ashamed to commit.[16] Next, a drinking competition ensues. The more a man drinks the merrier. He will be considered a charming, a splendid fellow. And what does drunkenness not contrive at such parties? Those fertile cups,[17] what sinful deeds do they leave untried? Now Pithias looks much more handsome, now Chremes has become much more jovial.[18] True, they say, is that popular saw: Love is feeble without food and drink.[19] Later on, when they have had their fill of wining and dining, they rise up to dance. Whose heart is calm enough, firm enough, hardened enough, to resist those wanton gestures, the rhythmical movement of arms, the song of the cither, and the voices of the young women? Whom could they fail to seduce, to shake, and to weaken in his resolve? Especially since they are always the kind of songs that could warm the cockles of any man, even one as cold with age as Laomedontiades or Nestor.[20] And when the music-master touches the lute, as is the custom, and gives the sign to end the dancing, you will be considered a yokel if you do not heartily kiss the girl whose left side you have been hugging during the dance.

The other games that are even more shameless and devised only for the sake of impudence I shall not name. I wish only they were not played by those young people. And if you say no to one of them, if you try to act with greater modesty, they call you unsophisticated, unpolished, humourless, countrified, and opposed to common human feeling. What shameless behaviour will you not brook to avoid such embarrassment? And so it goes on: while you avoid unpopularity, while you are embarrassed to appear intractable, while you are ashamed not to be shameless (as St Augustine puts it)[21] you lose all modesty and, infected with the same scabrous disease as theirs, you go on infecting others.

But even assuming that you can avoid all company of wicked men (though I wonder how), the venom of the disease creeps up on you and is transmitted not only by contact (wherefore such diseases are called 'contagious') but even by sight: when eyes see wounded men, they feel the wound themselves.[22] In my opinion at least, the eyes play a principal part among the incentives that provoke us to the foulest deeds.[23] If you want to consult your interests, therefore, dearest Jodocus, keep as far away as possible from this scum and betake yourself to those whose company will make a better man of you.

8 / The bliss of a solitary life

Although I think that I have said quite enough, I would not want you to jump up and run away from the world in alarm, but rather to fly here happily and willingly, that is, not so much disgusted with the evils of the world as eager for our sweet life. Therefore it will not be out of place to say a few words here about the advantages of our life. This will have to be done rather briefly, first of all, because I have spent so much time, paper, and effort on describing, if only summarily, the evils of the world so that there remains less time for telling you of our life than the large scale of the topic demands (but then again, what speech could do justice to this theme, what stretch of time could be sufficient for such a speech?); secondly, I suspect that you are by now a little annoyed at me for being so long-winded; and finally, these matters are perceived more easily than told. I would therefore prefer that you learned of our life through experience rather than through my words, that it would be a matter of examination rather than persuasion.

Only make haste: retreat from the dizzying noise of worldly affairs[1] and come to us. Then you will come to understand how far removed from true happiness is the false and deceptive prosperity of the world, how much preferable are our labours to your luxuries. Yes, you will come to your senses like a man who has been roused from sleep:[2] while sleeping he was deluded by dream images and, thinking them real,[3] rejoiced and trembled, tossed and turned, and was moved by a thousand emotions; but as soon as he awoke from sleep he realized that he had been deceived by empty images, and made light of his own dreams.[4] The same thing will happen to you once you have come to know the blessings of our life. Whenever thereafter the dreams of your former life occur to your present wakeful mind, you will say: 'What? Have I been so crazy in my former life as to enjoy this or that kind of nonsense? Did those phantom images of worthless goods[5] rob me so completely of my senses that I never even felt a desire for what is truly good?'

Now unless you prefer the happiness of dreams to real happiness, awake if you are sleeping, my dear Jodocus; rub your eyes if you are drowsy lest a sleep deeper than time and eternity overcome you; but if you are awake (as I rather think you are) make haste and flee – for flee you can – lest the example of other sleepers and the hypnotic force of superstition persuade you to go to sleep. Flee from this Babylon, this land full of dreams and shadows, and hurry to our Jerusalem![6] Why look back? Why tarry? Why hesitate? Procrastination has always been harmful to those who are prepared, as Lucan says.[7] Up, delay not, break away,[8] for this undertaking is neither paltry nor child's play. You soul is at stake, it plainly merits sacrificing even what you love best and suffering willingly the greatest of hardships.

If an experienced physician[9] said to a patient suffering from a fatal disease: 'Give me free hand and I will soon have you enjoy your former good health' – tell me, what tortures would you not gladly suffer? You would allow your limbs to be amputated with a steely knife, you would allow them to be cut and cauterized, you would suffer a thousand other tortures almost more cruel than death itself, if only thereby you escaped death, if only thereby you could add a little time to your wretched life. How then, by the immortal God, can anything seem burdensome if you suffer it for the sake of escaping death – the eternal death of your soul? If the state of things were such that you had to choose one of two conditions – either allowing your body to die so that your soul might live forever, or paying for your body's life with your soul's ruin – I am sure you would not hesitate (unless you are madder than a madman) to consider the eternal life of your soul more important than the brief life of your body.

My dearest Jodocus, do you want to live a blessed life forever? Of course you do, for who would not? 'And how,' you say, 'can this be done?' Come and see how such a great achievement can be yours with so little effort. No need to seek the sky on Daedalus' wings, no need to cross the vast oceans, no need to undergo Herculean labours,[10] no need to leap into the fire.[11] No one is forcing you to mangle your limbs or to commit suicide. And yet who would call the martyrs of old madmen for thinking no torture, not even death itself, too harsh when they were led on by hope for happiness of this kind?

I beg you, consider how lavish is the generosity of the Lord towards us, and how gentle, on the other hand, are his commands.[12] He promises eternal happiness to those who deserve death.[13] What can be more generous, what can be more reliable than his promise? And in return what does God bid you do? No more than that you strive to be ready for his great gift. And how can this be done? you ask. He is not yet ready for true happiness whom false happiness holds in its grasp. Do you want to have eternal life?[14] Go and live a good life. Do you want to enter paradise? Leave this world behind which is as utterly wicked as it is wretched. Do you long to be one with God? Take care to free yourself from the devil's embrace. Do you love true wealth? Throw away false riches. Are you fond of true honours? Seek false ones no longer. In short, do you love true happiness? Abandon those enticing troubles, or rather, those troublesome enticements.

What can be gentler than these precepts? Their observance earns you a stipend of true happiness. Their observance in itself is the beginning of happiness. It is as if God commanded us: leave off being unhappy, so that you may be blessed. Leave off being slaves, so that you may enjoy freedom. Oh, how profound is the difference between serving God and serving the devil, between being God's soldier and being the devil's soldier![15] For, having baited his wretched victims with a few morsels of false happiness, heavens, into what horrors, what vileness, what misery he hurls them! And in the end, when he has abused them enough, he cuts their throats. God, however, leads us through but brief and slight troubles – suffered through our own fault, not because of the nature of things – then leads us to incredible happiness and, finally, to the blessings of heaven.[16] The devil's command is treacherous, his service hard, and the reward bitter – death, according to Scripture.[17] The contract with God is based on trust, the longer our campaign for him the easier it becomes, and the reward is most delightful: blessed immortality. The devil's soldiers have a wretched life, a worse death, and an afterlife yet worse; the soldiers of God live a happy life, die a happier death, which is followed by the happiest of lives. And who would not most gladly, and even without reward, serve under such a gentle and generous commander,[18] who imposes such sweet labours?

But if you do not trust me, listen to the exhortations of him who cannot deceive,[19] for how can Truth lie? 'Take my yoke upon yourselves and you will find peace in your souls, for my yoke is sweet and my burden light.'[20] Think what rejoicing there will be when the victory is won and the heavenly host in procession celebrates an eternal triumph. Think what rejoicing there will be when even serving him brings delight. And how much pleasure will that blessed freedom afford us,[21] when even his yoke is sweet?

But I expect my words will come as a surprise to some people, those in the herd, I mean, who, like brute beasts, measure all happiness by the satisfaction of their palates and stomachs. They will find it difficult to believe that the kind of work on which monks spend their lives is not only not troublesome and dreary, but even enjoyable and sweet. But since not even Truth itself can convince these people of the truth, I am asking them to find out for themselves, to put my words to the test. May I be struck dead if I deceive them – but I fear the fault will be theirs for not making the required effort.

Now if they are reluctant to find out by trial, they ought to trust others who have had the experience. I for one dare assert that everything here is full of pleasure: nothing is more enriching than our poverty, nothing more liberating than our servitude, nothing more restful than our labour; our fasting brings satisfaction, our confinement expands the horizon, our bitter afflictions are sweet, our hardships are easy, our vigils more refreshing than any sleep.[22] But they will not believe me even under oath. In fact, because I have joined together opposites, they will consider me as mad as one insisting that the night is bright, the day dark, that fire is cold and water burning hot. But what can you do with those mindless brutes who know only how to use their physical senses?

Come now, we must bear with their slow-mindedness. They must be brought to understanding by being presented with an argument familiar to their senses, so that they may deduce the unknown from the well known. Let us take them to the countryside or, if that is troublesome, to the nearby harbour. There let us hail any one of the sailors and ask him the following questions: 'Hullo there, good man, does this sailor's work give you trouble?' 'No,' he will say, 'as a matter of fact, I find it pleasant.' 'How so? Among all occupations yours seems to bring with it the greatest and most frequent troubles.' 'True, but on the other hand there is a great deal that keeps me from getting tired of it.' 'What things?' 'First of all, sweet profit sweetens every pot, doesn't it? And nothing is more lucrative than the sea. There are many alive today who've gone from rags to riches in one trip. Who knows, the same could happen to me. Besides, the fact that I am used to it lightens my work considerably. Getting used to things is important in life. No job is so tough that repetition wouldn't make it pleasant or, at least, easier. Finally, we have ways of lessening our chores or disguising our work so that we don't even notice it any more: we sing, talk, play games, joke, and do a thousand other things of this kind. – Now, I trust, you've heard a clear enough explanation.'

If we went through the trades one by one, each man, I think, would give us the same or a similar answer. What can we conclude from this? If the dim hope of making a slight profit sweetens the hardest labour for these workmen, why should we not experience the same effect when we have certain hope for eternal happiness? If habituation has such a profound effect on them, why can it not have the same effect on us?[23] If they have means of alleviating their troubles there must be far more, and more effective, means in our case.

9 / The greatest freedom is found, not in this world, but in seclusion

To avoid further confusion in your mind and any lack of organization in my speech, let me state that seclusion offers three advantages: freedom, peace of mind, and pleasure.[1] Let us first discuss freedom.

We are all by nature desirous of freedom. There is no one who does not shudder at the thought of slavery. In fact, many have committed suicide because they loathed slavery, thinking freedom preferable to life, death preferable to slavery. If men cherish freedom so much that they think false freedom must be bought at such a high price, they ought to seek and adopt our way of life, for it brings genuine freedom and freedom in the highest degree. At this point someone who does not know any better will say: 'If, according to Cicero's definition, freedom is the ability to live as one pleases,[2] I cannot understand at all in what sense you possess freedom. You are shut up in your cells like birds in their cages and can do nothing without the abbot's orders. You can't eat, you can't speak, you can't go to sleep or stay up, you can't come or go, you can't even yawn without his orders![3] And you call that living in freedom? By Hercules, you have no more freedom than horses and donkeys that are led about, reined in or whipped up, wherever the rider wants them to go.'

The retort is easy: We do not want to do what we are not allowed to do,[4] therefore we are allowed to do whatever we want to do. However, I shall speak of our freedom later. For the time being let me ask you a question in return: How dare you vaunt your freedom when you have so many masters that one day hardly suffices to list them all? First of all, you must satisfy your worldly obligations, as they call them, which so entangle anyone taking a hand in them and so enchain him that he must go wherever they call him. And what if you have a wife (or rather, if she has you, for marriage is a reciprocal arrangement)? Well, there is another fetter for you, a servile rule, bothersome indeed and not easy to shake off. And what if you are a wicked man as well? By the immortal God, what harsh servitude you have taken upon yourself! You must obey as many masters as you have vices. And they are the most hideous, wicked, and savage masters!

Who would call a man free who cannot be master of his desires but obeys their every command, however vile (and their commands are always vile), however hard (and they are often hard). Your eyes need rest, you wish to sleep, but no: desire, that domineering mistress, keeps you from it. She commands you to revel all night,[5] to gad about, to visit your lover, to spend a sleepless night with whores in a stinking brothel.[6] There you must be a slave to the vilest mistress. She gives the nod, you must obey. She says no, you must obey just the same. She throws you out, you must go. She calls you back, you must return. Do you not consider that slavery, and slavery of the most shameful kind? What freedom is there for the man who has desires? He would like to live quietly at home – that is what his love of leisure dictates. But can he go ahead and do it? Provided Mistress Desire will let him! 'Is that what you're doing, you lazy fellow!' she says. 'Slacking off, are you? Don't you see what great profit you could make by expanding your business into England? Come on, pack up, it's time to set sail. Look, the winds are favourable.'

And, to satisfy the command of your mistress, you spend whole winters traversing lands and seas,[7] regardless of storms, wife, children,[8] or even the risk to your life. This, then, is to live in freedom? The same case can be made for every single vice, but I realize that I have been chatting idly for some time now. We must go on to the rest, though not without explaining first in general terms that no one can be free who is wicked.

Have you never felt shame and loathing at your wickedness? Often, I am sure. For can anyone be so corrupt as never, for an instant, to look into his heart and, seeing its sinfulness, wanting to reform, either from fear of punishment or from love of virtue? 'Yes, indeed,' you say, 'sometimes I struggle to get away from my bad habits, but even as I am getting ready to abandon them, the habit of sinning detains me, I know not by what force, and draws me back to my former desires.'

What you say is the absolute truth. Well then, poor wretch, do you acknowledge that you are kept a prisoner? Do you finally realize that you are a slave to your vices? When they notice that you are making preparations to desert them, that you are already plotting your flight, they lay hands on you and send you to the stocks, so to speak, bound and chained like a slave.[9] Go ahead now, you fool, and brag to us of your freedom when you must be a slave to the world, to your wife, to fortune, desire, pleasure, and ambition, when you are a slave to the devil himself. Indeed you may rightly join Syrus, that character in Terence,[10] when he says: 'I'd like to know how many masters I have!' – except that he is shamming, while you can speak from your heart. As our Hegius so wisely said: To serve many masters is a most wretched lot.[11]

How, then, shall I describe to you our freedom? Does it not seem a wonderful kind of freedom to live outside the dominion of Fortune (if she exists), neither fearing a harsh fate nor praying for a good one; being neither shattered by misfortune nor elated in any way by luck? We can answer her confidently in Democritus' words: Go, hang yourself – as Juvenal has it[12] – and show her the middle finger. Fortune has no authority over us. We have put away our desire for possessions with the possessions themselves. We stand in the service of God. What if Fortune took our life? We are convinced that no ill can befall us except one: wickedness. Those who have lived a life of wickedness must indeed fear death, but good men need not be afraid. On the contrary, they ought to yearn for death, since it transports them from this world to a happier life. Moreover, we have broken those iron, nay, adamant chains of wordly affairs and, being relieved of their most irksome burden, have turned our minds to heaven, considering unimportant what happens on earth. What freedom can be greater? With the help of God we have finally thrown off the yoke of that harsh Pharaoh,[13] we have ceased to be slaves to the most wicked masters – our vices, I mean.

Of course, we are not so perfect as never to admit any sin (I cannot say whether or not this is granted to any mortal in his lifetime), but our case is like that of a soldier. He will rightly obtain the greatest victory and glory in battle who has fought at close range and fought bravely, not escaping without being wounded himself, but in the end capturing or killing his enemy. Conversely, he would be considered vanquished if he allowed himself to be captured and led into slavery, even if he saved his skin and remained unharmed. Thus it is with us: what does it matter if it comes to pass that we lapse once in a while (for as I said before, it is almost inevitable for human beings) – what does it matter as long as we are sure of victory in the end, sure of preserving life and liberty?[14] For this reason those who have fought bravely in battle often bare their breast to show their scars or, if the point of a dart is stuck where the missile chanced to hit the body, they return to camp or to the city displaying themselves and consider it a great honour to let it be known that they have sustained grave wounds in the course of protecting life and land. It is better indeed to be carried back into camp half-dead but victorious than to remain unharmed (if that be granted) and surrender one's life to the enemy. And the man who has given himself up to his vices has surrendered his life to the enemy. And what kind of enemy? The vilest, the most monstrous, the most dangerous there is, an enemy who is keener on our death than on his own life. And what can be more shameful for a man, what more unworthy of his human dignity, than to suffer the devil, wicked as he is, as his master while holding in disregard the one to whom he owes his life and all his possessions? Especially since serving God brings the greatest and the only freedom.[15]

Therefore, if anyone begins to feel tired of that servile freedom, if he begins to yearn for this most liberating servitude, he will know where to seek it: here, in this very place. While serving God is the only kind of freedom (as we have said) it is nowhere enjoyed as much, nowhere as great as when living in seclusion.[16]

10 / In seclusion we enjoy a twofold peace[1]

Who can give a worthy account of our peace? Here none of that disturbing din of the world assails our ears. For what place in the world is not full of noise, full of tumult? One man laughs, another cries; this one complains, that one goes to court; one brings us greetings, the other conveys a message; one calls, the other recalls. There is a coming and going, a shouting and running about.[2] Wherever you look, wherever you turn, not one quiet spot. You encounter only noise. One could think you are in some busy ship-channel.

What time is there, among all this business, to compose one's mind? Who can be true to himself, who can live for himself if things constantly change their aspect? In this uproar, how can the human mind contemplate or do what is worthy of its divine nature? And how can the soul, deafened[3] by constant and excessive noise, hear her bridegroom knocking at the heart's door, hear his voice addressing her?

Indeed Elijah[4] felt the Lord's presence not in the city but on a mountain, not in court but in a cave, not during a hurricane crashing over the rocks, not during an earthquake or a conflagration, but in the low whisper of a gentle breeze. If you were to take your time and read sacred history, you would find that the greatest of divine miracles were worked not in crowded but in remote places. Where, for instance, do you read that Moses was shown that secret sign of the bramble-bush burning with a red flame that did no harm?[5] Was it in the cities of Egypt? On the contrary: he had fled them in fear of the tyrant, and had come to the mountain of God, having penetrated vast and deep forests. Life-giving manna rained from heaven, not on the inhabitants of smoky houses, but on the dwellers in the desert.[6] And where did that divine procession take place, when the commandments were to be given, when all at once the fiery dart of a lightning bolt flashed from the thick clouds of darkness, when thunder rolled and the heavenly trumpets rang out a fearful blast? On the summit of Mount Sinai, the people having been told to keep their distance.[7] We also hear that once the prophets' sons, the future prophets, disdained houses and lived on the banks of the river Jordan.[8] And where did St John, called the Angel of the Lord[9] because he was of more than human nature – where, I ask you, did he live his heavenly, his flawlessly pure life? Where was he taught those divine secrets that enabled him to point out God unerringly even though he came concealed under a human nature? Not in the house of his ancestors, but in the desert.[10] Moreover, we often see that Jesus himself, our Lord, sought solitude, as if tired of the crowd. How often do we read that he taught in the mountains?[11] And how often that he worked wonderful miracles in the desert and on shores: curing diseases, healing corruptions of body and soul, driving out wicked spirits, appeasing the hunger of a great many companions with a very small amount of food?[12] When he wanted to fast he withdrew from the view of men and hid in the desert. And it was on a mountain that the three apostles had their wonderful vision.[13] At dusk, on the night in which he allowed himself to be taken prisoner, Christ sought solitude in a garden,[14] to pray. It is he himself who tells us to seek the privacy of our bedrooms when we want to pray.[15] In the end he died outside the walls of the city (not by coincidence, to be sure, but by divine plan) to make you understand more easily that he fled commotion, hated the clamorous stage, disliked the noisy market-place, took no pleasure in crowds and multitudes, but enjoyed solitude and loved tranquillity.

Need I add human and more trivial examples?[16] Need I speak of Pythagoras who, they say, learned many secrets in a cave on Mount Ida?[17]

Of Plato who considered the garden of the Academy[18] a much more suitable place for practising philosophy than the city of Athens? The poets themselves have invented all sorts of rocks and coves as the scenes of their divine inspiration, indicating thereby that anyone wishing to compose an exceptional and charming poem must withdraw from the crowd.[19] And (to take an example from the common people) we see that masons, goldsmiths, painters, and other artisans whose craft demands an exceptional degree of concentration turn to a place where the noisy crowd of men does not interrupt their work when they wish to make something rather detailed or exact. From all these examples it is easy to see that crowds hinder those who have a difficult task to perform, and that peace and quiet promote great enterprises.

But what can be more difficult, what can be a more serious task than that which aims at a blessed life and at the salvation of our soul? Of this concern you cannot take good care in the secular world, for where, in that world, will you find peace and quiet? But here, my dear Jodocus, silence reigns everywhere:[20] both within and without a deep peace prevails. The very remoteness of the place creates peace without, and peace within comes from a noble and pure heart. But each requires the other's assistance, and if you take away either one, you will find that you have lost them both. External peace fosters internal peace, nourishes and protects it; and conversely external peace would be bothersome, tedious, and even dangerous without internal peace. In fact the poet says that a violent or disturbed man ought not to remain on his own: whatever you do, 'solitude is harmful to you, beware of solitude. Whither your flight?' You are safer among the crowd.[21]

Although I know that I must hurry on, I do not want to pass over the noble advice given by the philosopher Crates (for it happens to be most appropriate). On seeing a young man strolling up and down, deep in thought, meditating on something or other, he asked him what he was doing. 'I am talking to myself,' said the young man. 'Beware, then,' answered Crates, 'lest you talk to a wicked man.'[22]

How wittily and concisely they each expressed themselves! The meaning is this: to seek seclusion is praiseworthy, but only in a praiseworthy man; to wicked men, on the other hand, nothing can be more harmful. For when they are on their own, they think of violence, conceive the greatest crimes, and make cruel plans for themselves and others. What else could drive wretched people to hasten their own destruction if not the opportunity presented by solitude? Who else but a lonely man has ever drunk poison, broken his neck by hanging himself by a rope, stabbed his heart with a sword, or hurled himself headlong into the deep?

'Well, then,' you say, 'why praise solitude so highly if it is such a harmful thing?'

I cannot think of a more appropriate reply than Crates' words just quoted: When you live by yourself, beware lest you live with a wicked man. Other than that you will have nothing to fear from solitude. Keep an even greater distance from vice than from the crowd. Let your surroundings be quiet, but at the same time see to it that there is no commotion in your heart. Of course I have no wish to commend to you in my long speech a Timonian solitude[23] – I merely want you to withdraw from the mob, not, like Timon, from all mankind.

But enough about external peace. Now we must deal briefly with inner peace, that is, the kind that exists in the heart and can only come from the heart, if it be virtuous and conscious of no sin. For such is the power of virtue that it brings wonderful peace to the man in whose heart it dwells. It calms and soothes him and frees him from all anxiety, horror, fear, and disturbing thoughts. You will have a better understanding of its great value, if you consider what anxieties, what agitations are borne by the evil heart. For anyone who is a thief, embezzler, libertine, traitor, rapist, adulterer, or a criminal in other ways lives in perpetual fear and anxiety, burdened by the awareness of his crimes. In his sleeping and in his waking hours those images of his crimes pursue him like so many terrible Furies.[24] Every little thing makes him blanch and robs him of his senses. He fears everything, but most of all he fears suspicion, rumours, bad repute, judgment, and execution.[25] Indeed, let us assume that criminals do not care about what people know or, at any rate, manage to deceive them, let us assume as well that they have no fear of the immortal God – how can they escape their own conscience? Nothing is less likely! Wherever the criminal turns, wherever he directs his flight, those dreadful tormentors of his heart stay on his heels. They threaten, they shake, they terrify him. They take away his pleasure in food, in sunlight, in life, and in the end make rest itself restless. This explains the criminal's loss of weight, truculent expression, mean looks, and fear of every little thing, by which they often betray themselves. This has been ordained wisely and justly by the fairest of all judges so that no one can do harm without suffering punishment. For some ugly suspicion usually falls upon the man immediately after he has committed his evil deed. This, first of all, is sufficient punishment for the evildoer; secondly there are rumours and ill repute, which most people consider such a bane that they prefer to lose their life rather than go on living exposed to them. A number of criminals, however, have become so corrupt that they do not find it difficult to overlook rumours and bad repute. Indeed, let that common saying be true: Their luck is as good as their deeds are bad.[26]

Let it be true that there is no prosecutor and no judge to give them trouble. But the day will come, the avenger will come, to punish them with inexorable severity!

'That day is far off,' they say, as if they could be certain of living another hour, however brief. But let us grant them a span of life: bad conscience within them exacts the punishment for their evil deeds here and now. So harsh is its punishment that no crime can bring satisfaction great enough to make the torture worth while. Has anyone ever weighed up the terror of a seething heart, the violent uprising that rends the heart, the factions that pull it this way and that, shaking it up, plucking and tearing it apart? Memory serves as its prosecutor, the mind sits as its judge, and conscience plays the executor.[27] Reason beckons this way, nature another, the desire to sin a third. Hence a continual goading on, a continual struggling and battling. We must therefore conclude that those churchmen had a point who thought that remorse and bad conscience follow evildoers into the underworld,[28] making up the greater part of the punishment they encounter there. Thus Juvenal's words, admirable as ever:

Why think them scot-free whom the mind
Conscious of dreadful deeds, keeps numb
With fear and slays with silent blows,
Plying the hidden goad, the heart
A torture? 'Tis punishment
Severe, more cruel than the stern
Cedicus and Rhadamantus have
Devised, to bear within your heart
Your witness, day and night.

And a little further on:

Grant that the plan succeeds. His fear
Will last forever. No relief
He'll have at dinner time: food lodged
In awkward bulk between his teeth,
And throat as parched as a sick man's.[29]

And so forth, the rest being just as truly and elegantly spoken. These points, supported by both reason and authority, could equally be proved by adducing a thousand examples, but so as not to follow up every detail, I shall content myself with three examples, the first taken from myth, the second from Roman history, and the last from Holy Writ.

What is the meaning of the myth in which Orestes is depicted as being pursued by harsh avengers (commonly called 'Furies') as soon as he has slain his mother,[30] and haunted by them so that wherever he flees, he finds their faces staring at him? What does it mean but that a man who has committed a crime is so pricked and tormented and belaboured by his conscience that he appears to suffer from some madness? Many stories have been cleverly thought up by the poets but none, in my opinion, is more to the point than this one. This is why I never tire of hearing the story told.

And what can be more convincing than the example of Lucius Sulla?[31] We read that the man's cruelty was so insatiable that it is pathetic to relate the story of the proscriptions and executions he ordered – and he was no less notorious for his other crimes. But it was his own wickedness that exacted the tyrant's punishment (when no one else could punish him),[32] for he was so tormented by the conscience of his evil deeds that he suffered insomnia and could not recover his sleep by any device or medical help and finally died from a vile disease that they call *pedicularis*, lousy distemper.[33]

It remains to speak of the infamous Cain,[34] an example of old but just as clear an illustration of the point at hand. He is said to have killed his brother out of jealousy, but he did not do so with impunity. He suffered punishment at once and of various kinds, but none more severe and deadly than the punishment inflicted by his conscience. She brought down a harsher judgment on the perpetrator of the crime than the creator himself did. He scolded Cain, or rather, pleaded with him to elicit a confession and, at the same time, make him repent, but the wretched man thought his sin was too great to be pardoned. God had granted him life, but he considered himself unworthy of life. What harsh executioner, must we think, savaged his heart? How do you suppose he could have enjoyed life when he was his own enemy, despaired of his own fate, was a burden to himself, considered his life a bitter one and feared to come before the eyes of human beings, all of whom he imagined to feel toward him as he felt toward himself? Can you see, my dear Jodocus, what tortures, what blows, what pricks of conscience, what upheaval, what commotions a wicked mind has to bear?[35] Now consider what it means to have a good conscience, never to blanch with a feeling of guilt:[36] it is a feeling of complete equanimity, peace, and enjoyment.

What could upset a heart so equipped and constituted? In truth, what can be fearful to such a heart? Human beings? He need not fear human enmity who can rely on God's friendship. Misfortunes? He considers them a gain. Death? He desires it of his own accord. God himself, then? Not even God himself, because he trusts in his love and care. Can one imagine anything more peaceful, more secure, more fortunate? One can sense this feeling, Jodocus, but it is quite beyond words. And surely you do not consider this a negligible reason for joining us with all speed?

But perhaps you are already blessed in your world with the peace to which I am inviting you. I am confident you are, but there is all the more reason, in my opinion, to come here. For here you will enjoy your blessings in much greater measure and much more safely. Why be so bold as to carry around a great treasure among robbers?[37] Here the treasure you possess will increase, there you are in constant fear of losing it. Here that inner peace is greatest, and here or never will you find external peace. In your world external peace does not exist, and inner peace is rare and precarious, for monastic life makes wicked men good and good men better while the world usually makes good men wicked and wicked men more wicked still.

11 / The pleasures of a secluded life

I see, however, that I have spoken about tranquillity at greater length than I had in mind – though in fewer words than the topic demands. Now I shall discuss as briefly as possible the one remaining aspect of the topic: pleasure.

Pleasure is the one thing to which all men are so earnestly devoted that no evil can deter them from its pursuit and no argument tear them away from it. And perhaps Epicurus is right when he says that men may misjudge what constitutes pleasure, but that they are unanimous in pursuing pleasure in one way or another.[1] Therefore laymen ('secular' men, as they are called[2]) often stay away from our way of life or dislike it principally because they think it gloomy, harsh, unfit for human beings, and devoid of all pleasure. Lest this misconception prove a discouragement, I shall demonstrate that the matter is very different. So far is our life from lacking pleasure that I should boldly invite all followers of Sardanapalus[3] to this way of life as being a paradise of delights.[4]

'What?' you say, 'pleasure in monasteries? You are drawing me a picture of a dolphin in the forest, a boar in the waves!'[5] Yes, my dear Jodocus, we live wholly by the rule of Epicurus. 'How so?' you ask. You will hear it presently. Epicurus says that pleasures entailing troubles in uneven measure must be rejected.[6] For this reason we avoid immoral conduct, refrain from adultery, and refuse to guzzle like Asoti.[7] Sober we watch the sun rise, sober we watch the sun set, neither of which such men have seen, as they tell us. All their pursuits are always such that they bring more trouble than enjoyment. Moreover, public office cannot make us rich or famous, nor do we desire it. In this point also we do not diverge from Epicurus' teaching.[8] Since such things bring very little pleasure and a great deal of trouble, we are wise in our refusal to obtain very small advantages at the price of very great inconveniences.

Epicurus also teaches that one must sometimes undergo pain for the sake of avoiding greater pain, similarly, that one must always pass up some pleasures to obtain greater ones.[9] Is that not exactly what we are doing? We bear vigils, fasts, solitude, silence, and other such deprivations so as not to be forced into suffering greater pains. We do not drink at sumptuous banquets, or dance, or run off wherever the desire carries us, or indulge in similarly worthless pursuits – but if you could only see how much we profit from this, our abstinence! Did you think that we missed out on pleasure? No, we did not miss out, we exchanged one for another, and in a manner that allowed us to receive a great many pleasures in exchange for a few insignificant ones.

By now, I think, all those sleek and luxurious people are pricking up their ears,[10] hoping that I shall teach them some novel trick of achieving pleasure. I shall teach them indeed, but what I wish to do is to draw their minds away from those vile pleasures that we share with brute beasts. Let them stop behaving like animals, let them realize that man possesses something more exalted and divine by which pleasure should be measured than the body's standards.

Now since animals have nothing better than their bodies, it is not without reason that they measure their happiness by the satisfaction of their stomach and sex. But man has more dignity than that: he must think of his destiny as different from that of brute animals, for it is agreed that he has not only a body, but also a soul. As far as the body is concerned we differ from brute animals only in appearance, but by virtue of our soul we approach to some extent that divine and eternal nature. Our body belongs to this earth: it is brute, slow, mortal, prone to disease, frail, sluggish, and ignoble; our soul, on the other hand, is heavenly, light, divine, immortal, lasting, lucid, and noble. Who is so wrong-headed as not to see that there can be no comparison between soul and body? Spiritual pleasures are superior to physical stimuli to the same degree that the body falls short of the soul's dignity. Spiritual pleasures are like the soul itself: true, lasting, never disagreeable, genuine, honest, divine, and salutary; physical pleasures, on the other hand, are false, unreliable, utterly disgusting, vile, deadly, and containing more aloes than honey.[11] A man cannot possibly enjoy both physical and intellectual pleasures – he must relinquish one of them. And what would our wise Epicurus advise in this case? To reject those vulgar physical pleasures lest they keep us from obtaining the preferable and sweeter pleasures of the spirit.[12] And this, as I have said, does not mean missing out on pleasures, but rather exchanging them at a profit.

By now, I suspect you will want to hear what spiritual pleasures we are enjoying. First of all, the pleasure of being free from that horrible pain caused by a bad conscience. According to Epicurus (and let us not abandon him), this is the greatest pleasure, for he who is free of pain feels no small pleasure.[13] Secondly, is it not pleasurable to contemplate the heavenly, the eternal delights that we hope to enjoy, God willing? Can anyone be so hard-hearted as not to weep with joy when, weary of this life, he thinks of the blessings of heaven? Can anyone be so dejected, brought so low by mental anguish, that he will not be elated, exhilarated, and eager to leave his mean body behind when he thinks of that life in heaven? And how will he feel once he has tasted it? Of course, men who retain a taste for this world cannot yet savour that pleasure, but holy minds know it very well, for although the pleasure of that life is reserved for a future time and cannot be perceived until the soul emerges from its bleak prison[14] to fly back whence it came, pious minds, it seems to me, are filled with a sort of foretaste or presentiment and, bedewed with a kind of heavenly shower, are able to catch a certain glimpse of that eternal light.[15]

He who has not experienced this pleasure can hardly be persuaded of its existence, while those who have experienced it find inadequate every estimate and description of its worth.

Although moments of such delight are rare (as St Bernard says)[16] and usually of brief duration, they are nevertheless so intense as to make all pleasures of this world combined into one seem mean and despicable by comparison. Thus even if we had no other reward to expect from our good deeds (which is not the case at all), I would for this one reward suffer labours[17] untiringly and judge it worthwhile not only to neglect all other temptations to attain it but even to declare war on them. Think now how bountiful those pleasures must be when even the slightest taste provides such delight, such refreshment, such emotion. How great a pleasure it will be to bathe in that divine light that can be seen only by the purest eye,[18] until we ourselves are all lustrous, when even a brief glimpse of its pale shadow (if I may call it so) brings such pleasure, when even to meditate on it is joyful.

Moreover, this is that sweet pleasure with which the Spirit, the Paraclete, that is, our comforter, fills the pure heart whenever he secretly steals into it, whenever in that chaste marriage-bed the bridegroom embraces the bride languishing with desire for his love and soothes her complaints – for she complains like all yearning lovers[19] – with gentle and loving affection.[20] That sweet, sweet pleasure – how could it be described by me? Let them who know tell of it![21] And blessed are they in their knowledge, the men to whom the experience was granted. I myself have not yet earned a share in these delights, or, if I have had a little taste, prefer to speak of other men's experiences rather than my own. To speak of one's own experience may be safer, but to speak of others' is more modest. Now, I have often heard these men confess with tears in their eyes that those worldly pleasures that please men of corrupt tastes appear to themselves so insipid that not only do their minds shrink from the thought of them, but even their ears from hearing them. No wonder: acorns lost their taste when the use of wheat was discovered.[22] Just so these men began to disdain false pleasures once they had tasted true ones.

Alas, there are many champions of the world,[23] many of that boorish and stupid kind of man whose gullet is so used to pig fodder that he has no taste for anything but his acorns and simply cannot understand how life can be sweet without them, or why one should go on living once the acorns (the pleasures of stomach and gullet, that is) have been taken away. Whenever such men happen to see us engaged in our labours (they consider them labours), which (they think) they could not even survive, and see us in better spirits and better physical condition than they themselves, who spend their life partying, they are always greatly surprised and cannot understand from what source we can possibly derive enjoyment after having rejected carnal pleasures. They look at the tender young men and the delicate young women; they look at their youth and beauty; they recall how indulgently they have been raised until a little while ago – and against this they set all that is harsh and gloomy in our life: solitude, labour, vigils, fasts, and the other things of this kind. They see that not only are these young people free to pass up this kind of life, but they are in fact advised to do so, admonished, begged, and urged with a surprising degree of importunity by their parents and friends. The young people on the other hand resist all the more staunchly, giving dry-eyed comfort to a weeping mother, disregarding a sister who almost strangles them with embraces,[24] and are willingly parted for life from their dearest companions when just before they considered it a hardship to keep away from them even for a single day, when they bid their last farewell with such cheerful mien, imparting the last kisses with such eagerness that no one present, not even a stranger, could hold back the tears.

Here I must ask for your indulgence when I relate the story of that tearful last meal which the best of virgins, Margarete,[25] whom I have always loved like a sister, had in the company of her parents. I myself was present and with me many others whom the daughter had taken pains to invite as her advocates to join her in her entreaties; for she had been vainly pleading with her father for six years now to let her become a nun. She had already conquered her mother's heart, for neither parent objected out of meanness. Both easily surpass their peers as much in virtue (and that is rare in prosperous circumstances) as in position and appearance, so that no one fails to love and praise them: but they are so disposed toward their children that they love them deeply and fondly.

Well then, we began to belabour the father and, to keep the story short, he agreed, overcome partly by his own embarrassment, partly by compassion for his daughter, partly by our importuning him. Thereupon you could have seen a tragedy unfold: the father embraced his daughter and, kissing her, began to cry as if he must lay her into her grave at once. The mother, overcome with grief, fainted. Her only brother, a young boy, and an older sister, both lacking fortitude, one because of his youth, the other because of her sex, sobbed loudly and embraced their sister in turns. 'By these tears,' they said, 'and by a sister's and brother's love, if they count for anything, we beg you not to desert us in our misery, lest your single person be the undoing of us both!' Of her other friends some wept silently, others prayed, others again gave her advice or reproached her – but certainly no one's cheeks remained dry. At length even we who had come to plead the daughter's case were moved by the tears and lamentations of all the guests and particularly by the sight of her father, an eminent man crying like a baby, tears welling from his eyes. Moved by this spectacle we ourselves began to cry, disgraceful though it is to tell. We were almost sorry to have caused such a commotion. What was a young woman to do in the midst of this? A young woman, fragile by reasons of her sex, age, and disposition, refined by her upbringing? Even St Paul reports that, when he was about to say farewell, he was moved by the tears of his brothers, though not moved to change his mind, and said: 'What are you doing, weeping and disturbing my heart?'[26] But Margarete, notwithstanding her great love for her parents, was dry-eyed and composed and gently assured her father that there was no reason to worry himself. By rights he should be joyful since it was not a loss but a gain to have a daughter to pray on his behalf before God. In like manner she tried earnestly to soothe the troubled minds of her mother and the remaining guests with kisses, prayers, and words of admonition. In vain: the banquet went on, prolonged into the night with sobbing, weeping, and lamenting, while Margarete alone kept her cheerful disposition.

Whenever those who, as I have said, have no other criterion but their palates, see such goings-on (for they sometimes do), they too burst into tears, wondering at the young people's fortitude and feeling shame for their own weakness. Now, what do they suppose is happening? Surely they do not believe that these young and beautiful people with such physical and mental accomplishments, can be led, or rather turned, away from the pleasures of this world so easily unless they have already found more intense pleasures? That they would hasten to undertake these labours with such high spirits unless they found them sweet? Yes, my dear Jodocus, this is obviously the answer. Our labour is sweet to those who know it, bitter and harsh to those who do not know it.[27] But will the day ever come when one can convince them of this? As St Bernard says, they see our cross, they do not see our blessings.[28]

I wish these people could be given a sharper mind unless they themselves prefer to be mad and are fond of their misconceptions, as was that Argive in Horace.[29] But I want to convince at least you with my arguments (and I do not have much further to go). Oh, if my wish could be granted and my heart's feelings poured into yours as surely as your eyes will see these lines! – that is, that you could feel in reading these lines what I feel in writing them. If that were the case I should terminate my letter at this point, and should not think of wasting any more words on winning you over, but since I may be wishing in vain and since my authority may not be sufficient to win you over, I cite one witness: Jerome, venerable for his life and distinguished for his learning. Pray, tell us, saintliest of men, was your life joyless in that horrible solitude when you were exhausted by excessive fasting, consumed by almost constant vigils, and worn out by great labours?

'Whenever I was in seclusion,' he tells us, 'in that vast solitude which, scorched by the heat of the sun, offers a rugged home to monks, I felt surrounded by Roman delights. God is my witness: after many tears, after fixing my gaze upon heaven, I sometimes thought I was among the host of angels, and I sang with happiness and joy: Following you we shall hasten on toward the fragrance of incense.'[30]

Have you listened to his testimony, Jodocus? I could cite other witnesses as well, but we shall believe either Jerome or no one. Now this pleasure all pious men have in common, but there is another, special pleasure enjoyed by all learned men whenever they read the writings of excellent authors or themselves write texts to be read by others, or when they turn over in their minds what they have read. This kind of joy has so many forms and such depth that one can never tire of it. And how could one tire of it? If it pleases us to read something out of the very sources, we can turn to the volumes of the Old and New Testaments. If we enjoy truth, noble by itself, ennobled still further by the lustre of eloquence, we quickly turn to Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Cyprian, and similar authors. If we are a little more fastidious and wish to listen to the Cicero among Christian authors, we embrace Lactantius Firmianus.[31] If we like a simpler style and a square meal, we take in hand the books of Thomas, Albert, or someone similar.[32] And if you cannot be parted from old friends forever,[33] you may even go back to them at times when you have leisure, but in such a manner that you are their rival, not their associate.[34] For there is among them that captive woman, barbarian but of honest mien, whom you will take as your wife instead of keeping her as a concubine, once you have cut her hair and trimmed her nails.[35] Thus you have at your disposal the many volumes of Scripture filled with sacred mysteries; you have the monuments of the prophets, apostles, commentators, and Doctors of the church; you have the writings of philosophers and poets, which need not be avoided by the man who knows how to pick salutary herbs among aconite.[36]

Now what do you say? Is this not living in a paradise of delights:[37] perusing these authors with the greatest leisure, at complete liberty, and free of cares? Can there be room for boredom in such variety?[38] And what is there that is not full of pleasure? Just as the fields are fresh and green, the grass dotted with colours, adorned with a lovely variety of blooms: the beauty of deep-red roses here, the soothing brightness of white lilies there, and elsewhere smiling purple violets and yellow thyme breathing soft fragrance. There too are the lovely groves with their luxuriant growth of leaves weaving a shady bower to fend off the noonday heat; and innumerable kinds of tree laden with sweet-tasting and, what's more, salubrious fruit; and close by a crystal-clear stream gliding by, bubbling sweetly, bedewing all: that deepest of streams, I mean, which the prophet in awe declares inexhaustible.[39] We may walk about in these lovely orchards, wander around in them, and gambol, so to speak, at our pleasure. Can your dances, can your inns and bathhouses match such an experience?

To these pleasures, Jodocus, I call you because you are a man of learning and scholarship. I invite you because you are my dear friend. Is there anything left now to hold you in your world or keep you from ours? I have explained to you how deadly, how bitter are the temptations of the world which 'embrace us only to strangle us,' as Seneca says.[40] Wealth, too, as you have heard, has neither advantage nor stability. As for high office, I think I have shown convincingly enough into what misfortunes it can thrust a man. And about the inexorable necessity of death I have also spoken. Finally, I have noted how full of dangers, how vulnerable to calamities is life. Go now and tell me which you would choose: to be caught in those troubles or to make your escape from them? After having learned, in turn, what freedom, what peace, what pleasure, what hope we enjoy living our life – do you not yet make haste to come hither? Are you still undecided, still deliberating, still hesitating to leave Egypt to its fleshpots and be nourished by manna in the desert?[41]

'It is hard,' you say, 'to be drawn away from the companionship of those who are dearest to me, to suppress the love for my friends.'

Hush, Jodocus. You call this hard? Look to it – is it not rather that you are too soft-hearted? Beware lest the young boys and girls to whom it did not seem hard at all should mock you in these words: 'You say you cannot do what we have done? Why then sport a beard, why call yourself a man, why live all these years, why boast an education?'

You may be certain that there is nothing more inimical than friends who stand in the way of your salvation or attempt to keep you back. What if they are wrong because of a misconception or have lost their mind because of love – must you join them in their craze? If they are in their right minds and oppose you with full knowledge of the facts, how can they be called friends when they do not have your best interests at heart?

'But,' you say, 'to live like an angel while still flesh and blood exceeds human power. In fine, not to be allowed to live according to one's own wishes but to do everything according to another's will or rather, whim, is more easily said than done.'

That I will not deny, for I am well aware that man's life on earth is a battle.[42] But if there is any difficulty, it lies almost wholly in the inception of the matter at hand. And this difficulty you can avoid by approaching the task with vigour and enterprise. As the common saying has it, well begun is half done.[43] In this case, however, making a beginning means having completed almost the whole task. But it is that first step that frightens you. I have means of alleviating your fears. Are you reluctant to be torn from the pleasures of this world? Think of the pleasures that are lasting. Does our life seem sad and harsh? Consider the tortures that will be eternal. Nothing can be torture that will help you escape eternal tortures, nothing can be a pleasure that will deprive you of heavenly pleasures. Nothing will be hard if your heart instructs you keenly, nothing will be hopeless if you do it with the help of Christ.

12[1]

I see that for some time now you have been packing up your things and putting on your travelling boots to hasten to us right away, but I must give you a few warnings in advance, lest you depart too rashly and experience what I see many men experiencing nowadays, namely regret at having joined our way of life. This happens because they did not enter this way of life, but rather hurled themselves headlong into it, as into a well of no return.[2]

No one is forced to profess himself a Christian, but one must never abandon this profession, and without it there is no hope of salvation. As for the other institutions founded by men in accordance with the needs of the time, it may not be advisable to tie a man down forever and allow no retreat, as long as the change is beneficial to him who undertakes it. After all, men differ a great deal in their physical and mental conditions, and all their affairs are subject to a great deal of change. But since those whose judgment governs the world have decided otherwise and the man who has once made a decision in favour of entering a monastery is not free to change his mind, this matter must be approached with more caution.

Once monasteries were nothing but solitary dwelling places for pious men who disdained the enticements and vices that afflicted human life – more so at that time than now because pagans and Christians lived together – or who, harrowed by cruel persecutions, left the cities and hid in the pathless mountains to meditate upon an angelic kind of life. They clothed themselves humbly and ate sparingly so that any soil easily supported them; they spent all their time in sacred hymns, sacred literature, heavenly conversation, pious prayers, or charitable deeds, helping sick and weary travellers to recover their strength or devoting themselves to blameless works in support of needy people. In those times to be a monk meant nothing more than to be a true Christian, and a monastery was nothing else but a congregation of men united in the true teachings of Christ.[3] There was no rule, every man forged ahead of his own account, so that reins were needed rather than spurs. Friendly and brotherly scolding was the utmost punishment for them. Now most monasteries are in the midst of worldly affairs and so entangled in them that they are no less parted from the world than are kidneys from a living body.[4] So far are their institutions from preserving religious discipline that they are mere breeding places of impiety in which it is hardly possible to remain pure and innocent.[5] To them the title and habit of a monk are nothing but a licence to do whatever they please with greater impunity. And to these men, to whose judgment the world would not entrust its sculleries, the affairs of the church are entrusted, nay, surrendered. But even in those monasteries where religious discipline is strong, a certain risk remains: each man is suited to a different kind of life,[6] and therefore you must first examine yourself so that, knowing yourself,[7] you choose wisely a way of life you have come to know, testing everything but retaining only what is good,[8] according to St Paul's teaching.

Many people embrace a religious profession for no other reason than to live in greater comfort, consulting the interests of their stomach, not their spirit. And so it happens that men whose meagre means in the secular world taught them frugality and industry give themselves up to indolence and luxury once they live in a monastery. And men who were impoverished and humble in the secular world rival the pomp and luxury of satraps and kings once they have taken the vow of poverty. And those who would have had to bear the inconvenience of marriage and be satisfied with one wife now indulge in all kinds of fornication freely and without constraint. And men whom the fear of secular laws and magistrates kept from crimes before now enjoy the privilege of sinning with greater licence on account of their monk's cowl and their religious title, which exempts them from the jurisdiction of bishops and magistrates. Through false vows of poverty they escape poverty, through false vows of chastity they satisfy their wantonness, through false vows of obedience they succeed in not owing obedience to anyone.[9]

Finally there are those whom some chance has brought to this way of life. One becomes a monk because he could not get a girl on whom he had set his heart, another because he made a vow to do so when he was frightened by a storm,[10] an illness, or some other danger. Some are drawn to the common life by a companion whom they once held dear;[11] others, ill advised, are dragged to the pit like oxen, by their noses.[12] Others again are pushed towards it by unscrupulous parents and guardians who wish to rid themselves of expense and worry[13] and who vigorously plot against the innocent young, who are easily deceived.[14]

Therefore I would strongly advise anyone against joining, at a young age, an institution from which he cannot free himself. One must become a Christian early, a monk late in life – though whoever is a true Christian is monk enough.[15] And there are quite a few whom superstition or even stupidity leads to the monastery, who do not understand what constitutes true religion. And these men think themselves to be good monks if they wear cincture or cowl.[16] One need not wonder if such people turn out to be more wicked as monks than they were in their previous life.

Therefore, my dear Jodocus, I want you to understand first of all what true religion means; then when you have examined your character and your physical and mental abilities, when you have discovered the kind of life that suits you, when you have found a brotherhood that is one in Christ, then join it, but leave all the desires of this world behind. For you have left the world in vain if you carry it with you, even into the monastery. There is no need to bring any of the Egyptian delights when you hasten to the land that flows with milk and honey.[17] Many people think they are second Anthonys or Pauls[18] because they do not fornicate, dance, or get drunk, when their minds are sodden with hate and jealousy, when their tongues spout poison and injurious criticism, when they are puffed up with all pomposity, when they are ill-humoured and intractable,[19] when they are self-indulgent, when they openly flatter princes for the sake of profit and knowingly and consciously allow Christ's glory to be obscured for the sake of their own glory.

Incest is a hideous crime (and not even from this sin are they free) but their flattery is worse than six hundred acts of incest, and the ruin it brings is spreading to all mankind.

Perhaps you will say that by now all monasteries displease you and no monastic congregation can ever be found that breathes the spirit of Christ with sincere hearts. Then leave the world in another sense: associate with men of integrity and consider yourself in a monastery whenever you are in the company of those who love truth, chastity, sobriety, and modesty, who repent and show these virtues in their lives.[20] And do not think that you lack any vows if you have kept the vow you made to Christ in baptism. You need no Carmelite or Dominican cowl[21] if you have kept unsullied the white gown given you at your baptism.[22] Let it not disturb your mind that you are not one of the Dominican or Carmelite community, if only you are truly a member of the Christian community.

Farewell, dearest nephew.

This page intentionally left blank

ON THE CHRISTIAN WIDOW

De vidua christiana

translated by
JENNIFER TOLBERT ROBERTS

annotated by
JOHN W. O'MALLEY and JENNIFER TOLBERT ROBERTS

On March 17, 1506, the Hapsburg emperor Maximilian concluded an astonishing alliance with Vladislav, the weak king of Hungary and Bohemia; the terms of the alliance provided nothing less than an engagement between Maximilian's six-month-old granddaughter Mary and Vladislav's heir as yet unborn. Fortunately for Maximilian, the Hungarian infant proved to be male. On the first of July, Vladislav's wife Anne de Candale bore him a premature son. Anne died in childbirth, and the baby at first gave little promise of surviving his mother. All the resources of sixteenth-century medical science, however, were marshalled to keep the sickly infant alive: the carcasses of freshly killed pigs provided an incubator for the little prince, giving rise to rumours that the baby Louis had been born without a skin.

The royal physicians' efforts were successful. On 12 November 1507 the prospective marriage alliance was confirmed, and the Hapsburg ambassador's diary summed up the achievements of the year in two words: *captus Ludovicus*. Mary and Louis were married in St Stephen's cathedral in Vienna on 22 July 1515 in a bizarre double ceremony that also bound Louis' sister Anna to a Hapsburg prince as yet unspecified – one of Mary's brothers, if he should prove willing, or, failing that, Maximilian himself, who knelt at the altar in St Stephen's and took the wedding vows on behalf of his family.

Mary of Austria was not yet ten at the time of her wedding, and it was several years before she journeyed to join her new husband's household. Once the royal couple were finally united in Buda, a great love was sparked between them, and they divided their days between carefree frolics in the open country near the palace, where they loved to ride and hunt like happy children, and desperate attempts (often masterminded by the young queen herself) to mobilize the Hungarian nobility against an impending Turkish invasion. The time allowed the teen-age lovers to enjoy each other was short. Already under Vladislav the situation in Hungary had been nothing short of dismal, with the nobility bitterly divided both from the peasantry and among themselves, and the accession of the ten-year-old king in 1516 had only intensified the venomous feuding. Diets held in rapid succession achieved nothing, as their legislation was not implemented. It was a pathetically divided Hungary that faced the renewal of Turkish hostilities in the 1520s.

By the end of 1525 it was clear that Suleiman I was undertaking a major campaign against Hungary. The fatal hour came in the summer of 1526. When Suleiman's armies had broken through Louis' southern defences and were marching into the heart of Transdanubia, Louis and his entire government marched out with a small but brave force totalling only around 20,000 men. They met the main force of the Turk's army on the plain of Mohács. Louis' band was so pitiful that when the battle was done Suleiman kept on marching in search of the 'real' Hungarian army. But the national army of Hungary and Bohemia had been virtually annihilated on the plain of Mohács in less than two hours, and in his flight from the carnage on the field King Louis slipped from his frightened horse and drowned at the age of twenty. After two decades of squabbling among the Turks, the Hapsburgs, and the Hungarians themselves, Hungary was ultimately partitioned, one section going to Mary's brother Ferdinand I (who had indeed married Louis' sister Anna), another to the Hungarian John Zápolyai, and a third to the Turks, a settlement that lasted, albeit with some modifications, for a century and a half. Louis' young widow did not remain long in Hungary after her bereavement. In her grief over Louis' death, she undertook a vow never to remarry. In 1531 her beloved brother Charles induced her with some difficulty to replace her aunt Margaret as regent of the Netherlands, and in this capacity the diminutive but determined widow served ably until shortly before her death in 1558.

During her stay in Hungary Mary had attracted the interest of Martin Luther, and in 1526 the revolutionary religious leader had dedicated four psalms to her. This act on Luther's part caused no end of consternation to Mary's brother Ferdinand, and largely because of pressure from him she turned away from the teachings of Luther, which had held great appeal for her during the years of her marriage. In part, however, the credit for Mary's return (however lukewarm) to orthodoxy lay with her trusted court preacher Johann Henckel, a friend and admirer of Erasmus, whose admiration for Luther was tempered by determination to remain within the Catholic church.[1] And it was Henckel who in July of 1528 observed in the bereaved queen an inward turn from her hunting and riding towards the consolation of books. Seeing how Erasmus might take advantage of this development, he promptly wrote to him of Mary's enthusiasm for books in general and for Erasmus' paraphrases on the New Testament in particular and proposed that he should place the queen 'under additional obligation' to him by some piece of writing dedicated to her (Ep 2011). Erasmus did not miss his chance, and *De vidua christiana* appeared shortly afterwards. Mary thanked Erasmus for the piece in her own hand, and Henckel had a precious goblet sent to him with further expressions of the young queen's gratitude (Epp 2309, 2345, 2350). The goblet was probably not precisely the reward Erasmus had in mind, but some years later Mary as regent of the Netherlands employed the same minister to make clear to Erasmus, by then terminally ill and abandoned by many of his former admirers, that he could count on an honourable position and a safe place of residence in the Netherlands should he wish it.[2]

Erasmus is not at his best in this overwritten and sententious piece, part of which may have been lying about among his papers long before the

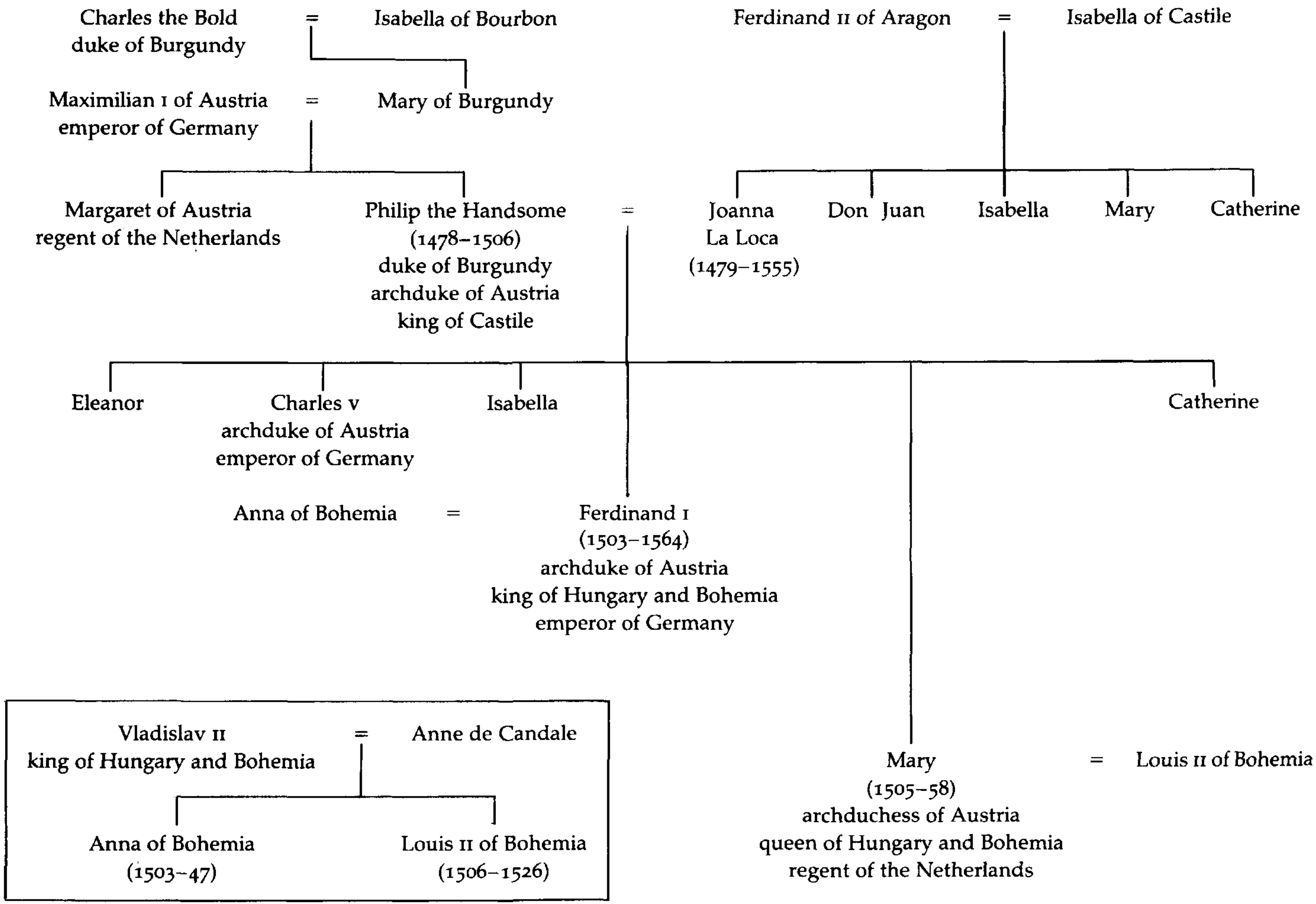
Turks marched on Mohács. He begins with some general introductory remarks on the cruelty of war, the sadness of a young man's death, the bereavement of widows, and the virtues of Louis and Mary. He then proceeds to discuss the proper training of the nobility, stressing Christ's teaching that all men and women are ripe for learning. He emphasizes the value of religious education for those in government and the importance of those in high station as models for the people, cites the models of the wise princes of the Old Testament, and upholds the practicability of living piously even in a decadent environment. The next section of his work concerns women and matrimony, and here he discusses the three female estates of virginity, marriage, and widowhood and the treatment of widows in the Old and New Testaments. Proper models for modern widows include Judith, Deborah, Naomi, Ruth, the mother of the Maccabees, Anna, and several other widows both from the Bible and from European history. Erasmus then reviews the teachings of Paul concerning the comparative merits of younger widows' remarrying on the one hand or being accepted into the ministry of the church on the other, and reprises Paul's stress on the importance of chastity in women. Erasmus sees many virtues in religious education for women, but he cites several dangers as well; though religious education will guard against some of the pitfalls of leisure, it is important that counsellors be chosen properly – books, rather than people, being the safest counsellors of all – and that religion not be used as an excuse for women to neglect their families. While Erasmus is concerned about the ill effects of remarriage on a widow's children, he also stresses that celibacy must not be used as a cloak for autonomy or concupiscence. Finally Erasmus discusses widowhood as a state of mind, stressing the special closeness of widows to God and explaining what it means for a wife to live as if she were a widow. The work then closes with a dedication and exhortation to Mary.

Altogether *De vidua* is somewhat heavy and tiresome, and it has all the earmarks of a set piece, but it is of some value for the light it sheds on contemporary attitudes towards the nature of femalekind. The disquisition does not lack the rhetorical flourishes characteristic of treatises composed for purposes of ingratiation, and at times Erasmus' flights of verbal fancy are embarrassing. At the outset of the piece, for example, Erasmus laments the suffering the death of such a king as Louis brings to parents and children, though it was common knowledge that Louis' parents were both long dead at the time of his demise and, as Erasmus himself mentions several times, Louis left no offspring. Though Erasmus resolved, at Henckel's urging, to make his essay a general treatise on every conceivable aspect of widowhood, still the fiery attack on step-parents on page 252 is not only strikingly misanthropic (manifesting as it does so little faith in human capacity for warmth and kindness), but, under the circumstances, remarkably inappropriate. The usual clichés about the natural inferiority of women to men abound. On page 187, Erasmus finds it remarkable that a mere girl could endure misfortunes that would unbalance a grown man, and the same topos is repeated on pages 192–3; on page 188 he argues that weeping and lamentation are 'womanish'; on page 219 he speaks of the 'value God placed upon assiduous prayer *even* [italics mine] in women'; and on page 253 he announces that 'men will be ashamed not to do what they see can be done by a woman.' It is not easy to extract Erasmus' true opinions from his exhaustive and exhausting comparison of the estates of virginity, marriage, and widowhood, as the role played by rhetorical acrobatics in that section of the treatise is particularly conspicuous, but it seems fair to say that his attitude towards the motives of women of his day is a fundamentally suspicious one: the motives of those widows who choose to remarry he impugns on grounds of lust, and the motives of those widows who choose to remain unmarried he impugns on grounds of lust as well. He is constantly on the look-out for embryonic unchastity. Much of his praise for study in women arises from his conviction that learning will turn women from their natural tendencies to vanity, idleness, and frivolity, and his hesitant concession that some younger widows should remarry arises in large part from his perception of a danger that 'freed from the jurisdiction of husbands, and corrupted by leisure, they will make a habit of going about to other people's homes, not only doing these people no good but indeed even making nuisances of themselves with their chatter and their praying, saying things that would disturb the peace of good Christian people. For those who suffer from the vice of curiosity suffer too from garrulousness, and nobody who comes running to you to inform you of the doings of others will be silent among others where your own doings are concerned. For all these evils marriage is the remedy. The authority of a husband will bring the natural levity occasioned by his wife's youth and sex under control; then too the responsibilities of a family give little space to idleness' (243–4).

Yet for all this Erasmus is a determined champion of the education of women, and if it is his tendency to see that education as serving to stave off immorality, it must be remembered that a moral purpose underlay his interest in the education of men as well. He returns more than once to the theme that Christ made no distinction between the sexes in their capacity for learning. 'Christ, the sure author of all truth,' he insists, 'explained to us concisely the celestial philosophy in such a way that no age, no sex, no temperament would be unsuited to his teaching as long as it presented a mind that was malleable, tractable, and ripe for learning' (191–2). Shortly afterwards, he is still more emphatic: if Christ admitted women into private conversation and even intimate familiarity, and if the apostles did the same thing; if Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and other church Fathers 'not only in their letters but also in their books and treatises dealt with virgins, widows, and married women' and were concerned here 'not with frivolous issues but with the teaching of Scripture' – why in that case 'would anyone judge that sex unable to be taught divine wisdom?' And he goes one step farther: 'If for a moment we focus on examples of religion and piety,' he writes, 'well, it is a little embarrassing to says this, but none the less the fact is so plain that it is impossible to avoid doing so: the order of women offers more examples of religion and piety than that of men' (193).

Throughout the text, then, Erasmus manifests a classic western ambivalence as to which sex was the more upright, and despite a habit of falling into cliché, he rejects much of the narrowly misogynistic teachings in currency in his day. Though the piece is somewhat turgid in conception, still the syntax is impressively tight and masterful. I have worked from the Leiden text of 1529, a clean text which is followed except for some minor deviations by the Froben text of 1540. Biblical citations throughout *De vidua* were identified not by me but by John O'Malley, the volume editor. Throughout the project, which took far longer than it should have, his remarkable patience and his alert critical eye have been invaluable to me, and for both I am deeply grateful.

JTR


Charles the Bold
duke of Burgundy
=
Isabella of Bourbon
Ferdinand II of Aragon
=
Isabella of Castile
Maximilian I of Austria
emperor of Germany
=
Mary of Burgundy
Margaret of Austria
regent of the Netherlands
Philip the Handsome
(1478–1506)
duke of Burgundy
archduke of Austria
king of Castile
=
Joanna
La Loca
(1479–1555)
Don Juan
Isabella
Mary
Catherine
Eleanor
Charles V
archduke of Austria
emperor of Germany
Isabella
Catherine
Anna of Bohemia
=
Ferdinand I
(1503–1564)
archduke of Austria
king of Hungary and Bohemia
emperor of Germany
Vladislav II
king of Hungary and Bohemia
=
Anne de Candale
Anna of Bohemia
(1503–47)
Louis II of Bohemia
(1506–1526)
Mary
(1505–58)
archduchess of Austria
queen of Hungary and Bohemia
regent of the Netherlands
=
Louis II of Bohemia

Family tree of Mary, queen of Hungary and Bohemia

ON THE CHRISTIAN WIDOW

BY DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM
FOR THE ILLUSTRIOUS
MARY,
ONE-TIME QUEEN OF HUNGARY AND BOHEMIA,
SISTER OF CHARLES THE EMPEROR AND KING FERDINAND

O Mary,[1] singular adornment of the entire race of royal women! Among the countless sorts of calamities with which the lives of mortal men are walled and surrounded on all sides, I have always thought that there is no evil harsher or more ruinous than war, which is all the more hateful because it generally arises from the hostility of one man to another. For earthquakes, floods of seas and rivers, strokes of lightning, plagues, and other misfortunes of this sort, however dreadful they are, none the less can only make men miserable; they cannot render them impious. Since, moreover, misfortunes of this sort can be ascribed to the Fates, they have therefore the common denominator of necessity, which even the gods, it is said, cannot resist; and this is something of a consolation. For just as the immovable necessity of the Fates – to which all mortal men alike are subject – relieves to some extent the grief of suffering, so those things that befall us through our own fault wound our souls all the more gravely. Misfortunes, therefore, though they make those whom they befall wretched, in no way make them by that token unfortunate; for no one can rightly be called unfortunate unless his misery arises out of his own fault.

But although war, purveyor of deaths and funerals, sweeps along with itself a huge armed column of all imaginable evils, there is scarcely any among its evils more fearful and cruel than the way it tears apart those who have been tied together by the closest of bonds. For this is something still crueler than death itself - even though of all the terrors that grip the minds of men, death is given pride of place by the most famous philosophers, and for this reason the god Mars, because he was so destructive, was dubbed by the Greek poets 'killer of men.' For who will not agree that there is nothing more cruel in the world than the slaying of one man by another? But it is also in the evil nature of war that it carries off none more frequently than the very best and most deserving of life – and spares none more often than those whose well-being is not of the slightest value to anyone, and most particularly those whose death would have been a positive service to humanity; so that it can be seen that what the ancients said about Mars being a leveller for all men is false, since he is most hostile towards the most innocent.

Oh, is it not to be deplored when a young man dies suddenly, a man flourishing in his very youth, his handsome body, his strength, his intelligence, his magnanimity, the wealth and status of his lineage? Indeed, such a death generally provokes tears even in strangers – sometimes, in fact, in enemies. The misfortune would have been easier to bear were the deceased the only victim of his own death. But ah, the death of this one man – how many people it knocks senseless! How many funerals it produces! How many deaths it occasions – and those all the more bitter, because they are slow. For the death that befalls in battle has this consolation, that it comes suddenly and frees a man quickly from his sufferings. But when it brings bereavement to parents, deprivation to children, widowhood to wives, mourning to brothers, sorrow to friends, and grief to one's native land – then what? Does this not torment many people together in one slow death? And this phenomenon is indeed all the more bitter as the bonds of love were tighter, the association holier and happier. Among the many ties that bind souls together, moreover, no attachment can be compared with that which couples a husband and wife in a lawful and holy covenant and ties them, in a word, in a Herculean knot,[2] as the ancients were wont to say. To this bond both the devotion of children to parents and that of parents towards their children give place; for after that which we owe to God, no devotion is held more sacred.

Nor indeed is it only the disposition of nature or the inclination of the mind that ties people together in such a tight bond: the highest creator of the universe has also prescribed that a man, if the circumstances should arise, should leave his parents and cleave unto his wife. For in other close relationships two souls are bound together by mutual affection; but in marriage they are bound together in accordance with the utterance of the divine word that said that two should be combined into one,[3] just as one person is made of soul and body. And what shall I say when the holiness of marriage is added to this inherent inclination of souls by which nature, taking thought for eternity, has united male to female and female to male – added to the covenant by which one is said to be joined to another by an unbreakable bond? What shall I say when a certain singular affinity of character and temperament, parity of fortunes and intimate familiarity has made man and wife prefer to die together than for one to survive the other? If that person is not quite human who forbids a mother to weep at the funeral of her son, how much less humane would it be to forbid tears in a wife who is burying her husband?

I think, illustrious Mary, that you understand the direction my words are taking. From what I have said, indeed, no one will find it hard to surmise how cruel a wound fortune dealt to your soul when it snatched your husband Louis from you. And what a husband he was! A young man of distinguished and truly noble character, promising only the richest future, flourishing in two sumptuous kingdoms, tracing his lineage in a long line from royal grandfathers, great-grandfathers, great-great-grandfathers – but in nothing more outstanding, in nothing more noble than in spiritual endowments worthy of the highest prince. And when you add to this the speed and manner of his death! For only a few years was it given to you to take delight in him when suddenly the savage storm of war snatched away this youth who deserved to live forever. But those things are relinquished with better grace that we have been permitted to enjoy for a reasonable amount of time; naturally, the longing for the loved one who has been snatched away is tempered in part by the memory of our long association, in part by the proprieties of mourning – which, if they do not suffice wholly to free us from grief, at least help to set some limit to our grieving.

Now one might have just cause to complain about one who demands a loan to be returned before its term has come due; but where no term has been set, then the lender has the right to summon the debtor on whatsoever day he may wish. How could anyone countenance complaints about the creditor whose mildness permitted the enjoyment of a loan for a long time? Whatever we have in this world is simply on loan. What need is there to call to mind other things, when this very body that we carry around with us, this very breath by which we live, are granted on the understanding that they are but loans, to be returned with good grace whenever he who has given them should call them in? To complain after the long enjoyment of a loan is the greatest ingratitude; we may look with greater indulgence upon complaints about the loan that is called in all too soon.

Within what a short time has it befallen you to be both wife and widow, both queen and private citizen; as if somehow, to make a mockery of you, fortune had given you so much enjoyment of such great happiness only so that it might torment you all the more in snatching away all that had been given. Add to this that it is generally some source of consolation to humans in their sorrow to have sat by the one so soon to die, to have heard his last utterance, given the last kiss of all, to have said the eternal farewell, have closed his eyes and offered the final service of burial. For this sort of thing enables the dying to depart with greater equanimity and the bereaved to grieve more temperately.[4] Even this comfort, such as it is, the furore of Mars begrudged you. Only one last comfort for your pain was left to you – if only a tiny Aeneas might play in the palace, in whom both your husband and your kingdom might after a fashion remain safe with you.[5] Then you would have found your consort in your son – and held onto the kingdom with that son. But even this sort of solace, Mary, the unfairness of the Fates begrudged you. How much more desirable it would have been for you to have perished with your beloved spouse than to have to go on living when he is gone! And I hear that you yourself came very close to death – or, what is even harder to endure, capitivity.

What grown man would not be thrown off balance by such a storm of evils? And yet it is upon you, a mere girl, that this savage, impious and cruel tempest has descended. The premature death of your father Philip, and soon afterwards of your father's father and your mother's father too, dressed you in mourning even as a little girl. Just recently you have bewailed your sister Isabella, an exile instead of a queen – and then dead instead of alive; and your other sister you have seen exchange the life of queen for that of widow.

Now at this juncture, I think, someone is likely to say to me: 'What on earth is the point of this speech of yours? To bring forth in this shattered woman the tears that you would have done better to have wiped away? To set once again in motion the mourning which has now been lulled to sleep by sober reflection or tempered by the passing of time? It is the place of him who consoles either to extenuate the evil that has befallen, or to distract the bereaved from dwelling upon it, or to add strength to the mind by citing the precepts of philosophy. But you, you are placing this parade of evils so squarely before everyone's eyes that you could spur even total strangers to weeping! It is a dismal sort of consolation that seeks to soothe pain by piling evil upon evil – although from time to time even this has offered solace to those who have grieved immoderately, just as there are people who, dealing more strictly with the bereaved, drive distress from their minds by their severe admonitions just as if they were employing surgery and cauterization as a cure.'

But I will not on this pretext excuse what I am doing. These things might have been alleged against me with justice, renowned Mary, if I had indeed assumed the role of a consoler; but in fact my actual intention is very different. For I do not write as I do in order to banish grief from your breast, or to wipe away your tears or stifle your cries, but rather to set you forth, illustrious young woman, as an example of fortitude for the consolation of other widows. That storm that has fallen upon you has fallen too on many other noble women – although from nobody could it have taken away more than from you, than whom nobody was more fortunate. Ah, how many women Hungary can show – indeed, how many the court of King Ferdinand[6] alone can show – whom that fatal massacre has either widowed or orphaned – or both! But of all these women there is none, I think, who endures her calamity with the stoutness of heart with which you have endured yours. Who indeed is there of such a womanish disposition that she would not blush to lose control of herself and to let out unseemly cries of piteous lamentation once she has caught sight of a young woman such as you, of such birth, such upbringing, enduring this most cruel fortune with a brave, unbroken spirit? Not, of course, that you fail to perceive how great the evil that has befallen; but the fact is that you are able with Christian piety to rise above your natural human emotions.

God has raised you up like a beacon from a lighthouse to offer safety to all those who may someday be in danger of suffering shipwreck in their pain. The higher your shining example is placed, the more easily it will strike the eyes of the whole world. The more publicly your example is displayed, the more the abundant line of your ancestors, in which you will find nothing but the highest monarchs of the world, pours forth light from all sides. Not to go back any great distance, you had as your father Philip, more beloved than any other prince in the whole world;[7] for your grandfather on your father's side you had Maximilian the emperor, and on your mother's Ferdinand the Catholic king – each one of whom was no more notable in the vast extent of his kingdom than in the endowments of his mind, and in his deeds accomplished as prudently as bravely; as your great-grandfather on your father's side Frederick the emperor, and on your mother's the king of Hungary; your father's sister was Margaret, a woman worthy of the imperial dignity. As your mother's sister you have Catherine, the queen of England – a woman of such learning, piety, prudence, and constancy that you would find nothing in her that is like a woman, nothing indeed that is not masculine, except her gender and her body.[8] This is the solemn procession that has gone before you. At your side are two brothers. One is Charles the emperor. His power is so great as to attract the envy of many – but so great his goodness as to merit the envy of none. To his goodness I do not see what could be added unless the peace of the whole world were joined to the splendour of his possessions. Then there is your brother Ferdinand, who, along with many other illustrious titles, is king of Hungary and Bohemia – a young man excelling in such great and so many virtues that among his honours the vastness of his realm and glory of his descent are the very least. Add to this three sisters, Isabella, Eleanor, and Catherine, all married to renowned kings – or about to marry them.[9]

Better if I do not prophesy about your brothers' and sisters' children, several of whom have already been born and been welcomed with the highest hopes. It is safe to boast of the past, but not of the present – for Nemesis often converts the prosperity of which we have boasted into sudden disaster. All the less dare we boast of the future, whose developments are unknown to us; but surely I may be allowed to pray that God may wish that this splendid family of yours should bring auspicious good fortune to the whole Christian world.

And, for fear of Nemesis, I would not have considered it safe to proclaim these things in your presence if I had not learnt, from those who know you better than I, the singular self-restraint and piety of your character – a character that has taught you all too well not to place happiness in those things that we see from time to time falling to the lot even of the unworthy. (And some chance is likely to snatch them suddenly from the deserving just as often as they befall the unworthy.) You have learnt too that these things are such that it is sometimes better to be despoiled of them than to be adorned by them, and that it is more praiseworthy to have condemned them than to have possessed them. The treasures of the spirit are eternal and inalienable: they alone make for happiness if they are present and for misery if they are absent. Knowing that your breast has been steeped in this philosophy and fortified by it, I have made so bold as to recount a few things about the splendour of your family and of your station, which I have touched upon ever so briefly in order to point out that a paragon of Christian endurance has been placed by divine providence prominently before the eyes of mortals, and so that all women (but especially women of noble birth, who are generally the tenderer for having a softer way of life) might learn, through the office of one young woman, temperance in good times and equanimity in bad. This they will attain if they see what defences enabled that soul of yours to stand firm in the face of such vicissitudes of fortune.

But in the mean time I must entreat you to permit me in your modesty to place before the eyes of the whole world your fine qualities – or, I should say in a more Christian way, the benevolence towards you of the best and greatest power; if you do not think this should be granted to my entreaties, surely Christian piety will wring that permission from you – that piety and charity that shrink neither from enduring nor from performing anything as long as it may be of advantage to as many as possible. Although I think this just and fair, however, none the less I would scarcely dare to promise myself that you would allow what I desire, nor do I think anything is more to be admired in you than the fact that you find your praises harder to bear than your calamities – if indeed anything that happens to a person short of the loss of his or her integrity can properly be called a calamity.

What therefore am I to do? The public good invites me to proceed; your singular modesty holds me back. I will follow a middle path. In this way I will gratify your modesty, but in such a way that some benefit will come to all women through you. I will not place too great a strain on your modesty, Mary; no, I will make my point not by adducing as an example a living person but rather by way of having an image placed like a painting before the eyes so that anyone may compare it to the living being when he wishes. Whoever has examined carefully the face of a human being depicted in colours recognizes whose it is, provided that he has gazed rather closely on the individual himself; and similarly anyone who examines the image of your mind at close range will recognize a portrait that is in no way false – except for the fact that we see more in a live human being than in a painting.

Briefly I will show in what things a noblewoman should be schooled. First, she must be fortified against the allurements of the court, and then against widowhood and orphanhood and other misfortunes of this kind, which as a rule unbalance many people's minds so that either they waste away in their suffering or they decree their own dooms. Nor should it surprise us if this happens in the case of women, when the same thing in men has generally called forth public praise, by the great consensus – but even greater error – of writers.[10] For why, really, should we consider that action worthy of being extolled that is impious and in conflict with the commands of God? To lay hands on oneself is either monstrosity, or madness, or weakness. To be sure, it may be all very brave to put an end to pain by suicide; but certainly it is braver to conquer bravely whatever evil may befall by enduring to the finish. And indeed many mortals have sought by their writings to fortify people's minds against the savagery of fortune; but I rather suspect that the struggle against the blandishments of fortune may be keener than that against its threats. Certainly we have known many who were left standing by the most pitiable mischances – and utterly undone by good fortune.

Perhaps, illustrious Mary, you are here expecting me first to offer you arms against the treachery of fortune when it is caressing and then to offer you others against the threats of fortune when it is cruel. I will not do it, for one can safely make use of the same arms against both. To be sure, the sea captain avails himself of one set of sails on a calm sea, another when a storm is pressing; a commander has his army drawn up in one fashion against the Parthians,[11] in another against the Gauls or the Germans. In this case, however, since it is a question of attitude, that person who is properly fortified is equally secure against every variety of fortune. The helmsman is not a good one who does not know how to control his ship except when the winds and tides are favourable, nor is he a good commander whose mind is not prepared for all those things that generally arise in war. Often he makes use of different strategies depending on the particular circumstance that has arisen; but the art of fighting and of retreating is the same. In this way the disposition of the soul that alone renders a person truly blessed or wretched shows itself in various guises according to circumstances, but none the less it is always true to itself, always the same. Just as Polyclitus modified his technique according to the material in which he was working[12] – wood, marble, plaster, or wax – although his art was always the same, so the person schooled in virtuous habits acts conscientiously in whatever circumstances God casts him; and if you look closely you will see that, though virtue shines more brightly in difficult circumstances, in fact it is often more worthy of admiration in prosperity.

I will not review here what the Stoics with great skill and marvellous words maintain about the nature of a wise man against whom alone fortune has no power – the wise man whom they proclaim is equal to the gods (indeed, at times they claim he is superior.) For what else but the dream, so to speak, and the shadow of true virtue could have been discerned by people who did not know the true God and creator, who were in doubt about the immortality of the soul, who had understood the resurrection of the body not even through a dream, who had discovered neither the source nor the end of wisdom? If you ask of them: 'What is God?' those who are least foolish respond that he is the spirit of the world, or everything that you see and everything that you do not see. If you should ask about the number of the godhead, they hesitate, since surely that which is incomparably sublime cannot but be one. And although every human good proceeds from the true God and by him is preserved, increased, and consummated, these people attribute the virtuous frame of mind by which they measure mortal happiness to human strength – so much so indeed that they think that this wise man of theirs could reveal the greatest contempt even for the gods above,[13] although they promise him none of the rewards that go to the doers of good deeds except that vainglorious title of wise man itself. To Christian humility, nothing could be more foreign than this title.

Farewell, therefore, to that wisdom that is as purblind as it is arrogant – but that none the less contains within it many maxims and examples that lay the charge of listlessness at the door of Christians. Although they did not have certain knowledge of God and were not inspired by the hope of attaining the kingdom of heaven or moved by God's Spirit, none the less they thought intently about the nature of virtue with whatever strength their mortal minds possessed, and delved deeply and subtly into so many things, and showed forth in their deeds many examples of virtuous accomplishments (or, if you prefer, the *appearance* of virtuous accomplishments). If all this is so, then it is singularly sobering to think that, for their part, a good number of Christians live in such a way that they do not seem to have thought even in the most casual of ways about the nature of true human happiness even though neither painstaking dialectic nor long years of study are necessary to come to an understanding of this. Rather, Christ, the sure author of all truth, explained to us concisely the celestial philosophy in such a way that no age, no sex, no temperament would be unsuited to his teaching as long as it presented a mind that was malleable, tractable, and ripe for learning. And God offers man what he needs to become teachable as long as he does not remove himself from heavenly grace.

In no way, accordingly, are they to be hearkened to who would remove from this philosophy princes and those who are in charge of the public weal, who would remove women (especially those who are found in the courts of kings), who would remove young people – for no age is more tractable than that which has not yet through the habit of vice grown indifferent to good counsel. Those indeed who deny that evangelical doctrine is useful for ruling principates or administering the public weal were refuted long ago by St Augustine; and we ourselves had said something on this subject in the panegyric that we wrote once for your father Philip,[14] and again in the book on the Christian prince that we offered to your brother Charles when he was still a youth and recently installed in his royal office.[15]

In truth, this doctrine is of assistance even in the conduct of war, the cruelest of all realities; for if the prince, imbued with Christian philosophy, having left no stone unturned in the attempt to avoid war, should none the less find it inescapable, he will conduct it with as little bloodshed as possible. He will take care that his soldiers have the least possible licence to inflict harm upon innocent victims, and he will try to see to it that the war spreads over as small an area as possible and that it not be prolonged for any period of time. Nobody wages war long who wages it unwillingly. I am unmoved by those who say, 'I myself hate war; I am pushed into it by wrongs that have been done; I prefer peace, of course, if only an equitable and honourable one is offered.' In just this way thieves make excuses for themselves. Nobody who seeks to exculpate himself lacks some rationalization. There is never peace among those who argue about perfect justice. In times of peace, however, the Christian prince will with the greatest piety take care to advance honourable and uncorrupted men in public offices. In short, in the conduct of his administration both in war and in peace he will bear in mind that not many days will go by before he must render account of each thing he has done, one by one, to Christ, the king of all kings, whose final authority is inescapable. It is far from true that evangelical doctrine is a hindrance to those who are involved in government; in point of fact that doctrine is necessary to all people who wish to live uprightly, but especially to princes.

As far as matters of age and sex are concerned, if Christ embraced children lovingly, and if the church judges seven-year-olds suitable for instruction in the catechism and entrusts to such tender age the mysteries of evangelical philosophy, and demands in action what has been taught – who then would dare to deny them such instruction? Similarly if Christ admitted women even into private conversation with himself, if he received some of them, like the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene, into intimate familiarity; if the apostles did the same thing, among whom John the Evangelist dignified one woman in a letter with the appellation *'Domina'*;[16] if Sts Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine and other celebrated Doctors of the church, not only in their letters but also in their books and treatises, dealt with virgins, widows, and married women[17] – and were concerned not with frivolous issues but with the teaching of Scripture – why then would anyone judge that sex unable to be taught divine wisdom? If for a moment we focus on examples of religion and piety – well, it is a little embarrassing to say this, but none the less the fact is so plain that it is impossible to avoid doing so: the order of women offers more examples of religion and piety than that of men – if, that is, piety consists in emulating the life of angels in purity of body and mind, having abjured the wealth and pomp of this world and placed all one's hope, solace, and pleasure in God alone; to aid the poor and the sick with money and other comforts; and to immerse oneself with tireless zeal in holy prayers, in fasting, and in meditation on Scripture.

They do well who warn the common people to verse themselves in Scripture with respect and awe, and not rashly to trust in their own judgment. Frankly, I cannot imagine what moves people unthinkingly to strike Scripture out of the hands of the laity;[18] surely their action is at odds with the example of Christ and of the apostles. What they forbid is encouraged by approved Doctors of the church, who judge worthy of the highest praise that very thing that these others execrate as impious. One must shout down, moreover, the voices of those who, while they desire to appear clever, none the less proclaim their impiety when they deny that the evangelical and apostolic doctrine is intended for women of noble and regal birth. This, they claim, is the concern of nuns, not of princesses. Let us cast aside the odium that attaches to that word 'nuns,' since in that nation from which it has come down to us it had no other significance than *sanctae*,[19] a title that in earliest times was common to all Christians, as the writings of the apostles proclaim. The works of more recent writers make clear that five hundred years after the birth of Christ all people who confessed Christ were alike called *sancti* and *sanctae* or *fratres* and *sorores*. But if it is the claim of all Christians that they live according to the teaching of Christ and the apostolic traditions, those who are embarrassed by the nature of Christianity should be embarrassed by the name as well. If they think it an insufferable insult if anyone denies that they are to be called Christians – why then, do they consider it unbecoming to live according to the teaching of Christ? Indeed, if they consider it an insufferable insult to be deprived of the honour of being called a Christian, they can easily enough conclude that it should not be honourable to lead a life that is at odds with the claim to be a Christian; and if they think that it is shabby and base to live pious and innocent lives, then they should likewise believe that it is magnificent and royal for those excluded from heavenly companionship to be consigned with Satan to the eternal flames.

Christ is not severe and censorious, as the hypocrites imagine; no one is more accessible than he, and he is no less meant for all people than is the sun itself. Truly those who think that the courts of princes are no place for true religion will be right if they remove from royalty the noblest aspect of human life and judge that it is vile to obey the laws of Christ – in the very place whence the laws of state derive. How can those who spurn the commands of Christ expect to rule their people with sound edicts? How can those who do not recognize Christ, the highest prince of all, countenance their demand that their people show them honour as princes? It may be true what they say, that a good man is not automatically a good prince, but it is plain that he who is *not* a good man cannot possibly be a good prince; and just as Plato said that states would never really be well ordered unless they had philosophers for kings,[20] so it is emphatically the case that the state flourishes never so well as when it is under a Christian prince who in all that he does has God, who knows all, judges all, and avenges and rewards all, constantly before his eyes.

If this should happen, whose home will be purer and freer from vice than the court of this man? This is the only difference between the prince and the private citizen: that the goodness or badness of the prince affects more people. All citizens gladly attune their lives to the character of their ruler, and the integrity of the prince deters even those who are wicked from wrongdoing. The character of a court thus will be shaped by that of its prince. In this regard, I think, you recognize your good fortune, illustrious heroine, and for this you are indebted to the best and highest God, in that you have two brothers of such holiness of character that their court cannot but be a model of religion and piety. You might say that each one of them was born and raised to be an adornment to his religion, and to show that the love of the supreme deity dwelt within them and that no amount of good fortune has yet sufficed to extinguish the ardour of their piety.

No small impetus, moreover, does the wife of the prince bring to the holiness of his court. The mind of a king is grand – he is, if I may say so, like a lion, and he cannot be easily dealt with by just anyone: but those who have come to understand lions and elephants may conquer and tame by their skill what no brute strength could subdue. A wife 'knows the supplest ways and times of approaching' her husband,[21] and it is not uncommon that she with her gentle entreaties can succeed where an armed line of battle would have failed. The very strongest powers, after all, are brought round sooner by entreaty than by insistence, for these powers do not suffer force at all. Paul wrote that from time to time a husband who does not believe can be made holy by a wife who does;[22] in this way it often happens that a queen in part by the holiness of her own way of life and in part by well-framed and timely entreaties brings a harsh or dissolute king to a holier way of looking at things; and if she is unable to purify the entire court, certainly she can at least substantially reduce the extent of vice there. You have also before your eyes these models in your own family – Isabella, for example, your maternal grandmother, a heroic figure admired and praised by all praiseworthy people, who burned with singular religious zeal, and who sought to incline not only her own court but also all of Spain to a pious way of life; and your mother Joanna, who was much like her own mother in this respect. (Your maternal aunt, the queen of England, we have discussed earlier.)

In view of all this, I must say that I could not disagree more with those who say that a high station in life is an obstacle to religious zeal. In fact, my opinion is that wealth and power, so far from standing in the way, are indeed positive advantages in the matter of religion. For since all Christian piety consists especially in three things, divine inspiration, solid doctrine, and pious works, God does not judge people according to their station; still, since he who is rich beyond all others is consequently able to be generous to all others, whatever their wealth or station in life, if there is any need, he imparts more benignly his gifts to those whom the splendour of good fortune has exposed as if on a stage to the eyes of everyone. For as it has seemed right to him in his divine wisdom that very often his gifts should be distributed by men among men, he bestows such gifts more copiously on those whose piety will bear fruit more widely and more richly. Thus he inspired David with his own generous Spirit; thus he instructed Solomon with his wisdom beyond all other mortals so that he might govern his people. The corner-stone of everything is faith, whose inseparable companions are hope and charity. This is the source, the head, the root, the foundation of all piety, and these things are common to all people equally, whether they be kings or, as they say, starving serfs.[23]

Nobody needs Christian teaching so much as those who hold wide sway in this world and on whose authority hang the most important human affairs. Those who are well born and educated in the liberal arts are generally inclined to be more tractable and more likely to follow a pious way of life; such people can devote more leisure to learning and to contemplating the road to eternal salvation; theirs is the easier access to teachers, books, and everything else that is necessary for undertaking these studies – although of course nobody whose mind is imbued with faith, schooled in charity, and excited by hope is unable to become schooled in this philosophy, which we have said is accessible to all; for through these virtues God has rendered the human mind teachable, since the ability to learn comes from the same source as does knowledge. Nor indeed is this Christian philosophy as complicated as many would make it out to be, if you remove those obstacles that the vanity of certain ambitious individuals has introduced in order to provide a vehicle for showing off their cleverness.

Finally, nobody is more prepared to perform works of piety than the person who excels his fellows in wealth, power, splendour, and dignity. For the prince should view all these things as nothing but the instruments of charity, as the means and matter for exercising virtue; and to whom does it fall more naturally than to princes to come to the aid of the needy, to support orphans, to give relief to widows, to liberate the oppressed,[24] to bring an end to disputes, to curb vice, to encourage people by laws and examples to live uprightly – or, if necessary, even to compel them? Hence they stray greatly from the truth who think that the study of religion is out of keeping with a high station in life; for in fact nobody has greater need to study religion, nor is there anyone more suited to learn such things or to pass them on to others or to practice them in his own life than those to whose own office has been joined the highest earthly authority and who are in an excellent position to strike fear in evil people and spur the virtuous to good deeds by the promise of rewards.

Finally, even princes have as their models, if not the Pauls[25] and the Antonys,[26] then certainly David,[27] Solomon,[28] Hezekiah,[29] and others whom the testimony of the Scripture proclaims to have been illustrious princes. They are not apostles, although anyone who performs a public charge is to a certain degree an apostle, that is to say, an ambassador.[30] For just as God sends prophets and wise men, so he sends kings and satraps, to succor the good and chastise the bad; and indeed although they are not themselves apostles, they have none the less as their teachers the apostles who, inspired by the spirit of Christ, prescribed a way of life for princes as well as for everyone else. In truth, preaching is one of the great functions of royalty, for though the monarch has a sword with which to take vengeance on malefactors, he has also a tongue, which is no less necessary than the sword and a good deal more effective; with it he encourages the people to obey the laws, discourages the military from licence and violence, reminds his judges and magistrates of their duties, inspires his citizens to live in harmony, resolves civil strife, settles disputes, and generally sees to it that everything runs smoothly.[31] There is no eloquence more powerful or more helpful than that which persuades to good by virtue of the authority of the speaker, and although any honourable argument can move people by its own force, there is keen incentive to believe such arguments if they have the authority of the prince to recommend them. If you read Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Chronicles, and Deuteronomy, you will see that Moses, the prince of such a great multitude, was nothing but a preacher, and that he exercised his power almost entirely by his eloquence, even pleading the case of his people from time to time before God.

Where are those scoundrels who upon hearing these things unfailingly burst out laughing? Ah yes, they say, of course, give the prince a tonsure, give him a cassock – as if somehow virtue were not fitting a king. You will find several examples of this sort of eloquence even in the annals of the heathen princes. Eagerly they sat on legal cases, spoke before the multitude, took part in deliberations, and – at no loss for words even in private affairs – led their lives in such a way as to be an example to the commonwealth, enduring sleepless nights while caring for matters of state. It is fitting, moreover, that a Christian prince should in all these respects exceed the piety both of the students of the Old Law and of the idol-worshippers. From those fawning flatterers, therefore, who believe that princes should have nothing to do with the evangelical religion, who ultimately would deem that person best fitted to rule who is most similar to a thief – from people like this, what is left but to take away the sacrament of baptism and the name of Christian? What is the point in leaving the empty name of Christian but taking away the substance? Nor is it reasonable to lay the blame for any impiety at the door of the prince's court, when, as I have said, the quality of his court is for the most part a reflection of the prince himself.

But let us imagine a typical court,[32] where such vices reign as self-indulgence, luxury, dances, gambling, cards, foolishness, insincerity, wantonness, excess, ostentation of wealth, arrogance, ambition, flattery, and frivolity of all kinds – pretty much the catalogue of vices that one finds at princely courts. The sort of people among whom one lives has the greatest effect on the integrity of one's life: the purest piety shines most brightly when one is among people of bad character and is all the more fired by zeal for goodness when it is provoked by the aggravation of evil. Association with the most sordid of states did not stain the holiness of Lot.[33] The court of Potiphar did not corrupt the chastity of Joseph but rather displayed it prominently.[34] The court of an impious king did not lead Daniel and his two comrades away from practising the religion of their native land;[35] rather both Joseph and Daniel were made prominent so that they could bring glory in this way to the name of their God. Esther did not lose her purity amongst the seductions of a godless court.[36]

To have lived well among good people is not so remarkable as it would be hateful to have lived among them badly. But the best proof of sincere and unaffected piety is to steer one's life on a straight course while living among those who find an upright life a source of ridicule or contempt. What city has ever been more corrupt than the ancient city of Rome? Yet Paul the Apostle lived a holy life there. What place has there ever been more decadent than the city of the Corinthians? Yet there Paul opened a school of holiness. He did the same at Athens, a city more corrupt than all others, and similarly at Ephesus, which also had a bad reputation – and not without reason. Constant dealings with the bad do not corrupt the innocent; it is condoning evil that defiles a person. Jews or any others who do not hesitate to cast impious aspersions on the glorious name of Our Lord Jesus Christ or who are known to be involved in indiscriminate killings, poisonings, thefts, or acts of adultery and to feel no shame for these things are guilty of enormous and deplorable impiety and are justly excluded from the company of decent people. One should abstain from associating with such people unless one is compelled by necessity – or led on by the hope of bringing them back to a better way of life. Inevitably a natural sense of duty binds a wife to a wicked husband, a child to a godless parent.

Now there is no harm in conversing with heretics, Jews, and Turks if you have some hope of spiritual profit, and it is only common courtesy to be polite to those we encounter in the course of our daily lives, even those whose way of life is repellent to us; but it is quite another thing to admit to genuine familiarity or to let into one's home people who are plagued by serious vices and show no signs of reforming. For whoever enjoys close connection with such people at the very least countenances injustice and, worse still, is himself heading for danger. To avoid familiarity with such people fills a double purpose. First of all, the character of the innocent person is in less danger of corruption; and, second, it may happen that the evil person may come to his senses when he blushes to see that he is being avoided by decent folk. For though a good man would ideally choose for there to be no evil people in the city in which he lives, when he finds that he lives in a state in which the bad are mixed with the good, he will order his life in such a way that he will in accordance with his ability lead the bad to improve their way of life and himself to improve daily through the example of the good.

Nothing, consequently, prevents the devout man from living an upright and innocent life among the luxuries and temptations of the court in such a way that courtesy is preserved towards all but real intimacy is reserved for those who either are virtuous already or show capacity for virtue; but the way of life of those whom he cannot heal of their vices he should endure in such a way that even the look of regret on his face will make clear how different his own life is. Let him raise his eyebrows at disparaging and flattering remarks alike, let him neither laugh at wanton jests nor respond to them, and in general let him remove himself from familiarity with such people as much as he can.

But since we live here on earth as mortals among mortals and not as angels among angels, there are certain human frailties that you have to put up with wherever you turn. Now some things (such as fancy clothes, elegant dinners, lavish buildings) are not bad in themselves, but only if they become too important to us and turn our heads. These things are not forbidden to princes, provided they indulge in them in moderation and do not get carried away, but rather make use of them in moderation, and for tradition's sake, as a device for impressing their authority upon the multitude, for it is useful to the state that the authority of princes should carry great weight. This weight, I grant, is most powerfully created and sustained by heroic virtues, but none the less these shows of authority also have force with the untutored multitude. Esther hated the mark of pride which she was forced from time to time to wear on her head.[37] What harm does a diadem do to him to whom a coarse garment of goat hair would be more welcome if only it were allowed? And if we are more affected by more recent examples, Germany has its Elizabeth[38] – in her rank a landgrave but in her piety a nun, who divided herself in such a way between her husband and Christ, between the court and the church, that not only did she avoid becoming tainted by any contagious evils but she also inspired many others to the love of God.

Just as food that only touches the body does not pollute the soul, so the clothing that touches the body does not corrupt the soul unless it touches that too. The soul itself cannot be touched unless an emotion is aroused. Often beneath grimy, filthy clothing, often beneath the rags of a beggar lies concealed a soul swollen with an arrogance that surpasses even the hauteur of Persian satraps. Often beneath the tunic of Diogenes lies concealed a soul enervated by self-indulgence. What does humble clothing signify if the soul is swollen with silken thoughts? A pious mind can be covered by any sort of clothing at all. It is no vice to possess wealth, only to love it. To live in an elegant house, to dress in fine clothes, to recline at splendid tables is no crime; the crime lies in placing importance in these things. When Plato was living at the court of Dionysius, the tyrant of Sicily, a young man most dissolute from luxurious living in a court thoroughly corrupted with delights of one kind and another, none the less he did not forget his own frugal way of life but rather turned Dionysius from a life of pleasure to one of eagerness for study of the academic disciplines.[39] Anacharsis, though living at Athens, a city in which it was very difficult indeed to live uprightly, none the less abated the austerity of his life not one bit.[40] Even in situations like this, Christian temperance should have a place, if it is possible. If it is not possible, then at the very least one should preserve the sort of beliefs that would be pleasing to God regardless of one's way of life. An Esther in royal purple, a Martin in the soldier's cloak[41] will present to God souls that are pure.

Down with those, I say, who would rob princes of the most precious thing in the world, that is to say, of living religiously, and of presenting to God a mind that is pure. True piety grows illustrious in favourable as well as in adverse circumstances, for each seduces one to vices, though I wonder frankly whether perhaps the greater danger lies in adversity. From how many comforts do want, obscure origins, and lack of resources take one away – and to what indignities do they compel so many people? To be sure, wealth tempts people to luxurious display and harsh arrogance. But poverty teaches cunning, flattery, deceit, pandering, theft, pillage, and all the worst sorts of mischief; embarrassing origins demoralize people and discourage them from undertaking noble projects, and the very obscurity of their lives offers them the opportunity to sin rather freely without fear of detection. In short, a gentle fortune invites vices but a harsh one compels them. A person who lacks integrity will be corrupted by either one; but the person who is filled with faith and charity will be true to himself in any station in life. No heed need be paid to those who make excuses of this kind for vice. Let those tongues be silent that wax eloquent only about relegating the study of virtue to the few. Neither age nor sex nor status nor position nor rank nor fortune nor way of life should prevent anyone from 'living piously in Christ Jesus,'[42] who dwells in no one place but is among us all, and wherever he is, there is the kingdom of God.[43] In fact all those things that the common crowd converts to excuses for vice become means of increasing piety for those who have imbibed the spirit of Christ.

I come now to widows, from whom sacred literature appears to exact particularly exemplary conduct.[44] It is not my purpose here to write a treatise celebrating the dignity of widowhood; already that most honey-tongued of speakers, Ambrose, did this so ornately, so copiously, that nothing can be added.[45] Nor do I write in order to exhort you while still a young woman to devote yourself to remaining perpetually in the state of widowhood, since the Apostle Paul did not dare to do such a thing, but rather preferred young widows to remarry and become matrons, fearing what they might be led into by the natural dangers inherent in youth[46] – not that widows should be denied the same qualities that are praised in virgins, but because perpetual chastity is a singular gift of God. We congratulate her to whom this gift is given, but we do not lead into a halter the person around whose neck it has not fallen naturally. Just, therefore, as virginity is revered when it is spontaneous, but is not enjoined, so the chastity of widows, while it merits the second praise after virginity, is not for that reason prescribed.

But if perpetual virginity is not demanded of anyone, since it is a rare gift and something so arduous is not to be attempted without the gravest danger, even less is it appropriate to impel youth to perpetual widowhood, as it is generally easier to abstain from pleasure entirely than to cast it aside once it has been tasted. What God wished to be decided freely by each individual, mortals should not try to legislate. Frankly speaking, however, I am not certain whether you should not perhaps make use of that liberty, which Christ (and, following the views of Christ, Paul) left to everyone, which both the demands of nature and human custom have approved – particularly since the loftiness of your station is such that even though the continence of widowhood might be more welcome to your nature, none the less the public interest might impel you to remarry even against your will. I know how praiseworthy the gentiles found monogamy, how hateful polygamy; nor does it escape me that the Germans used to feel that only virgins should marry. Not without good reason has praise been heaped upon Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi,[47] who preferred to be called the widow of Gracchus than the queen of Egypt when King Ptolemy sought to win her hand in marriage. Nor without cause is that dictum of Portia celebrated, in which she said that a modest matron need marry only once, and also the answer of Messalina to Sulpitia, when asked after the death of her husband Sulpitius whether she wished to remarry, since she was still young and beautiful. 'Never,' she said, 'for, as far as I am concerned, Sulpitius will never die.'[48] Similarly, praise has been accorded to Artemisia, the queen of the Carians,[49] and to Dido, the founder of Carthage,[50] and to numerous other women, who loved their husbands so much that they would have considered it a form of adultery to take another husband.

But the same things are not suitable for everyone. Not only your own inclination but also the needs of the state must be taken into consideration here, and on that account I will not try to convey the great praise that Christians accord to those who profess perpetual virginity. Nor will I offer a comparison of virginity, widowhood, and marriage, a line of argument that I see has been dragged out in a most contentious manner by several authors from earliest times; for it is an invidious form of praise to exalt virginity in such a way as to disparage the status of matrimony, or to admire widowhood in such a way as to revile second marriages.[51] How much more sense it would make to join our hands as in a harmonious dance of the three Graces, of whom each is endowed with such gifts that even if you could rank one first, you would have no idea whom to rank second. Each of these states of life has its own distinction and honour in sacred writings.

The first dignity is assigned to virginity, if it is undertaken of one's own free will and accompanied by the other virtues; the next to widowhood; and the third to marriage. You see, then, a ranking of sorts, but one that knows no competition for honours but rather is tied together by charity. For virginity is not to be preferred to marriage as gold is to bronze but rather as a precious stone is preferred to gold, and widowhood gives place to virginity only as onyx yields to a pearl, chrysoprase to emerald, crystal to diamond. If you compare gold to emerald, it is possible to doubt which you should choose; if you surround an emerald with gold, it is wondrous how beautifully each sets the other off. In this way each of the three states has some special characteristic in which it excels the others.

In married women, according to the Apostle, lies the honour of bearing children and taking charge of their religious education, in reward for which (lest it seem to you a matter of small moment) he promised eternal salvation.[52] In this regard virginity certainly gives way to marriage. Nor indeed is it of slight merit to have served the Lord in one's husband and to have won one's husband for Christ by one's pious way of life. In fact this thing seemed to the Apostle of such great moment that for this reason he did not want a Christian wife to leave a husband who was not yet a Christian, if the marriage were contracted before she was baptized.[53] Finally, virginity itself arises from marriage, and also for this reason virgins owe honour to matrons. Add, too, that marriage has been consecrated in heaven, with God himself presiding. If antiquity confers any authority, moreover, here matrimony gains ground. A virgin born from a virgin, the Lord first consecrated virginity in Mary. But, lest anyone imagine that this brings contumely on marriage, he wished to be the son of a virgin but also of a married woman, so that he should be born, if not from marriage, certainly in marriage. And if you look at the tradition of the church, you will find, to be sure, that it accords the first honour to virginity,[54] but that marriage is venerated among the seven sacraments. Finally, though virginity is held in greater honour, by the same token marriage is the less precarious course.

Widowhood too has characteristics that make it in some respects preferable to either of the other two conditions, for it has continence in common with virgins but also the generation and upbringing of children (provided that one has borne them) in common with married women. As we have said, moreover, it is a greater virtue to abstain from pleasures of which one has already tasted than to reject something of which one has no experience. Then too it shows greater humanity to care for children orphaned of their father than when one has a husband to take to himself a large part of this concern. That a mother should raise and educate children is a natural and necessary act of piety; but that she should bring up orphans is an act of compassion more pleasing to God than any sacrifice. Widows, moreover, are responsible for the guidance both of virgins and of married girls. It is the role of widows to instruct those recently married or about to be married as to how they should conduct themselves towards their husbands, towards their children, towards the members of their household, towards their in-laws and other relatives. Theirs is also the responsibility for instructing virgins and demonstrating to them how best to act so as to preserve their character and reputation. And in this regard, plainly, both virginity and marriage must pay homage to widowhood, by whose advice and authority both are aided, for just as we kiss the bloom of chastity in virgins and admire the service performed by matrons, so we venerate the authority of widows.

From this we can see that these three ways of life do not differ in dignity but rather are three separate stages. In the same way we first cherish youth in boys as the flowering time, so to speak, of the human cycle; we honour manhood as the appropriate time for performing valuable services; and we venerate and respect old age, which can give advice to the other two stages as it has lived through them both. Everything has a beginning, a development, and consummation. Thus in the old days at Rome a vestal virgin spent the first ten years learning the arcane rites, the second ten performing them, and the third ten teaching them to others, but during these three periods she was held in the same esteem; the three stages differed only in that those who were learning had all the grace of youth, the practitioners were performing a useful office, and the teachers had pedagogical authority.[55] Each of the three kinds of states, then, is worthy of praise for the virtues appropriate to it, and each should outdo the others in mutual respect rather than despise the others in an exchange of insults. The most frequent praise is given to virginity; but just as this state excels married women and widows in dignity, so it owes them more honour – married women in so far as they are mothers, and widows in so far as they are teachers. But amongst all the plaudits offered them, virgins must bear in mind the ominous saying of Solomon: 'The greater one's stature, the more humbly one should behave in all things.'[56] Finally, praise in these matters hangs not so much on the group to which one belongs as it does on the holiness of one's outlook, which can be of such importance that the second or third marriages of one woman may be more acceptable to God than the virginity of another.

If weight is added to an argument by examples, let us observe that though few were celebrated for their virginity in the Old Testament, what a handsome, what a large chorus of virgins in the New Testament there is who by virtue of their love for Christ despised not merely pleasure but also life itself. These have as the captain of their squadron the mother of Christ, in whom they rightly glory. And not they alone: married women also glory in her, since she was wedded, and widows as well. There is no agreement as to whether or not Joseph predeceased his wife; but it is agreed that the most holy Virgin, if indeed she still had a husband, behaved in such a way as if she did not, going to and fro among the apostles and attending to their needs (along with other women and widows). In the Old Testament married women have Sara as the head of their ranks, in the New Testament, Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist.[57] Widows too have as the captains of their squadron renowned women – Judith, for example, that illustrious female of manly strength who as a woman brought back a triumph over a foe unbeaten by men. Double was the triumph of Judith: a military victory, to be sure, which she produced for her country when it had lost hope, but also a victory for her chastity, which she preserved for herself unimpaired, for she killed a very brave man and made a mockery of a lewd one.[58]

They have also as a more reliable historical example Deborah, who *excelled men in prudence and fortitude and who accomplished so many* illustrious things.[59] They have the widow of Zarephath, a model of Christian hospitality.[60] They have Naomi, whose holiness has been glorified in the divine writings.[61] They have the mother of the seven Maccabees, a woman of wondrous strength, who suffered more punishments in her sons than in her own body.[62] And, look! in the very vestibule of the gospel here comes the venerable woman Anna to meet you – Anna, who, having been widowed early, endured to old age not in self-indulgence or leisure but in prayer and pious works, as if she had been preserved in this way in order to behold the infant of whose coming she had learnt through divine intimations.[63] And the mother-in-law of Peter also comes to mind, whom when she was lying ill of a fever Jesus caused to rise again and restored to her accustomed ministry.[64] Why should I recount here the many widows who ministered to the apostles from their own resources and who followed the evangelical call, abandoning all other concerns? It was in response to the entreaties of widows that Peter brought Dorcas back to life.[65] Why should I enumerate the many widows from more recent times who have been praised in the writings of illustrious men? Marcella, Principia, Paula, Laeta, Blesilla, Fabiola, Salvia, Sunnia, and Fretela, whom that distinguished Doctor of the church Jerome consecrated in the eternal memory of the ages in his holy books?[66] What need is there to cite Juliana and (unless I am mistaken) her mother, Proba, the grandmother of Demetrias, when the divine Augustine has delivered the glory of both these women from the danger of oblivion?[67]

Now it is true that in the Old Testament we see that perpetual virginity had not yet attained its proper honour, and widowhood was held in reproach, as was sterility; for in that time fertility in reproduction was a major concern. But these were the views of mortals, not of God; even in the Old Testament we see that God accorded great honour to widows, taking them under his special protection. Thus for example Exodus 22 says: 'If you injure a widow or orphan, they will cry out to me, and I will hear their cry, and my anger will rage, and I will smite such people with my sword, and your wives will be widows and your children orphans.'[68] What more loving concern can there be than this? For he who is the ruler of the universe specifically names himself the patron and avenger of widows. And again Deuteronomy 24 says: 'You shall not take the clothing of a widow as security for a loan,'[69] and Job 24 cites the confiscation of a widow's cow as a singular crime by which the anger of God is roused.[70] Similarly in the twenty-second chapter of the same work sending widows away empty-handed is listed as a serious offence.[71]

But if it is an offence to have given nothing to widows, what a crime it must it be to despoil them! Now the law does not forbid the taking of a pledge of security from a debtor; but still God wished widows to have special privileges in this regard. In Psalm 67 God is called 'the father of orphans and the judge of widows.'[72] What, is he not the father and judge of everyone? He is; but by special providence he is the particular judge and avenger of widows. Again Psalm 131 says: 'I will in a singular act of blessing bless his widow.'[73] What does to 'bless in a singular act of blessing' signify but a peculiarly copious blessing imparted to widows meaning: 'I will bless them in this world with the multiple solace of spiritual grace; I will bless them in the next world with eternal felicity, for they are a special care to me more than anyone else'? Likewise Psalm 145 attests to this, saying: 'He will succor the orphan and the widow.'[74] What greater indication of heavenly concern for widows? Deprived of the protection and solace of having husbands, they have been received by God into his special guardianship. Again through the mouth of Isaiah the Lord recommended the protection of widows as one of the principal works of piety.[75] This is supported by chapter 22, which argues that widows should not even be given cause for sorrow.[76] The same things he commanded through Ezekiel and Zechariah.[77] In short, this view is impressed upon us with such frequency and insistence in the sacred writings that I might look foolish if I were to try to collect all the relevant citations.

If we cross over to the New Testament, we will find that God shows there an equal concern for widows – indeed that this station in life is held there in greater honour. In Matthew 23, the Lord chastised the Scribes and the Pharisees because 'they devour the homes of widows, under cover of long prayers,' by which dictum the piety of widows is implicitly commended, since they could not be deceived by such simulation unless they had applied themselves to religion with great zeal.[78] In Mark 12 the Lord is delighted by the spectacle of a poor widow placing two tiny coins in the treasury, and he valued this pious offering beyond all other contributions.[79] In Luke 4 he refreshed our memory on the subject of the widow of Zarephath: to her alone Elijah was sent, starving, so that he would be nurtured by her, giving us to understand that Elijah signified the Lord himself, and the widow signified the church.[80] For the Lord came as if in famine to the earth, hungering and thirsting for the salvation of humankind. In the synagogue he could not satisfy his hunger, for he found no faith there; but in a poor widow who had nothing of her own, and who handed over to Christ all of the little that she had, he was restored. Nor did the significance of the case of the widow of Zarephath escape the Jews, for they led him out of the city to a mountaintop in order to throw him off it.[81] The Lord did not accede to their wickedness, however, for the time appointed by the Father had not yet come.

And so, widows, let it not be a source of sorrow that the Pharisees plotted against your limited resources, devouring your households in the guise of religion: a proud city hated and oppressed you, but you have as your patron, judge, and avenger God the Lord, whose power cannot be resisted. In chapter 7 of the same book he could not endure the tears of a widowed woman burying the lifeless body of her only son, but rather restored the youth to life and gave him back to the mother who had transferred the entire solace of her life to her only son when she was bereft of her husband; and in chapter 18 he set before us an example of incessant prayer – and indubitably he meant by this to indicate too that it is singularly appropriate to widows to devote themselves to constant prayer.[82] Nor did Paul, who had drunk deeply of the spirit of Christ, dissent from the teaching of his Master, for he admonished Timothy to honour widows in so far as they were true widows; and what Paul bade Timothy, Christ bade all bishops – to give widows the honour due to them.[83] By 'honour' he meant all manner of assistance and support. Writing to the same person, Paul commanded that if any Christian man or woman has relatives who are widows he or she should be of aid to them.[84] The Apostle did not consider it sufficient to commend widows to the care of Christians under the broad rubric of 'the poor'; he undertook their care specifically and by name.

Do not despair, widows, because you appear in this world to be powerless and oppressed, for you have heard proclaimed the dignity of your state; do not weep that you are desolate, for you have consolation and security in Christ. He has care for you – he without whose providence not even a single sparrow falls upon the earth.[85] He who alone is more powerful than all others has made himself your patron. Do not look to other mortals to avenge you, for he proclaims himself the avenger of any injury offered to you; rather simply place all joy, all glory, all consolation, all faith in him who has undertaken your singular protection, for that ultimately is safest that is in his guardianship. It is essential therefore that you remember your role, and you will do so if you truly deserve the name by which you are called. For when Paul ordered that honour should be accorded to widows 'who are true widows,' by this he meant that there were those who were falsely called by the name of widow, and that to these none of the things pertain that we have said about the dignity of widows and their care and protection.[86] For just as there are foolish virgins, whom the heavenly Spouse, the lover of virgins, does not recognize,[87] and false prophets, and false apostles, and false brothers[88] – for whom the honour of the name they have usurped provides cause for the most serious condemnation – just so there are false widows; and if these want to boast about these things that we have enumerated, let them take care that they become true widows and that their lives correspond to their name.

The very course of my argument seems therefore to dictate that I describe briefly the institution of widowhood, whose pattern seems to me best to be sought in these areas on which I have already touched, if we could only examine what lies within the words of divine Scripture, which, like an extremely rich vein of precious metal, will give back the most valuable treasures the further one penetrates them. Now it is true that there has been no lack of people who have handed down various prescriptions for how widows ought to live.[89] Although I see no need for these to be cast aside, none the less there is no need to adhere to them as one would adhere to the precepts of God – for the same things are not always equally suited to everyone. First of all, let us contemplate Judith, that glorious ornament to all widows – and not only a source of glory, but a fine example as well. If we examine her name closely, we will see that it comes from 'confessing' or 'praising.' For according to the peculiarity of the Hebrew language, *confession* has a double meaning; both the proclamation of our own sins and the praise of God.[90] He who recognizes his own faults will confess. Each kind of confession is most welcome to God, not for his sake but for ours. Because he is merciful, he delights in the confession of sins, that he may pardon them. Because he is kind, he rejoices in praises, so that he may lavish his bounty more richly upon mankind; for to confess his own injustice and proclaim the mercy of God is the singular justice of man. Although this is common to all Christians, moreover, none the less it is singularly fitting for widows, who are not worthy of the care God has bestowed on them unless they acknowledge their helplessness. Again, if they do not give thanks to the bounty of God for what they have received, even that will be taken away from them.[91] Paul the Apostle summed this all up when he depicted a widow as virtuous if she will place her hope in God.[92] She who has placed all her hope in God has nothing but mourning in this world and expects no other solace than from God.

By the same token, clearly the widow who lives in merriment has not placed her faith in God; for she is seeking solace from those things that are displeasing to God. Likewise she who prepares herself for a new husband has not yet placed her entire hope in God but rather looks to her new mate for solace. She who piles up wealth and seeks for earthly glories is not a true Judith, nor does she give her allegiance to God but rather to those things that she prefers to God. She who, trusting in her youth, lives as she pleases is no Judith.

Widows should not simply mourn their husbands, for this is mourning of a limited kind. It is condoned by human weakness and does not merit praise. The woman who mourns the death of her husband immoderately – what is she doing but aiming at another marriage, failing to give the slightest thought to how lucky the change is that has come over her husband, who has traded his mortality for immortality? Nor does such a woman give thanks to God, who took her husband away because it was good either for him or for her – or perhaps for both. For he calls people to eternal felicity in various ways, and he alone knows what is best for each.

Whence therefore flow widows' tears? They are lamenting their own faults – or if they lack them (as no one does), they lament the faults of others. They weep for the weariness of this, their exile. They weep out of their longing for the heavenly Spouse, with whom they desire to be coupled in complete and eternal union. Those who mourn in this way will hear along with the apostles that 'women who mourn are blessed, for they will receive solace.'[93] She will deservedly be called Judith who takes responsibility herself for anything bad that happens but ascribes anything good to God and trusts in the Lord in both good times and bad, believing 'that he is good and his mercy is forever.'[94] Sometimes he is more propitious and merciful to those who have suffered sadness than to those who have enjoyed happiness. Judith, moreover, was the daughter of Merari,[95] a name that means bitterness in Hebrew;[96] the first step in turning to God is penitence, which carries with it mourning and bitterness. And penitence engenders the confession of one's own injustice. But, as Paul said, 'this sadness, since it accords with the will of God, brings forth certain salvation.'[97]

The devil generally snares people to their destruction by baiting them with delicious pleasures; God, on the other hand, by salubrious pain inveigles people into eternal life. The one ensnares, the other heals. The former by petty pleasures that pass quickly decoys people to everlasting torture, the latter through a bitterness that is brief leads them to joys that are eternal. Add to this that nobody becomes a widow except by the death of her husband. Thus every Judith is a daughter of Merari, bitterness. And it happens not infrequently that this appropriate bitterness delivers a widow unto Christ; for in him, if one loves him with one's whole heart, there is more pleasure than in hundreds of marriages, however happy. Meanwhile, everybody knows what a risky business marriage is. It is the proper pursuit of all widows, moreover, to abjure all the pleasures of this world and seek all their solace from God. Like any difficult undertaking, this one brings bitterness at first, but in the fulness of time, if God is propitious, it will lead to great joy of spirit.

'Judith,' the Scripture says, 'was rich not from goods that she sought but from goods that she inherited.'[98] Why should abundance of possessions bring praise to a widow when wealth is accustomed to corrupt even people of sensible dispositions and lead them into decadence and lewdness? But for this our Judith, the wealth that was left to her was nothing but the means of succouring the poor. She possessed things as if she did not possess them; she possessed things rather for others than for herself. She came from an illustrious family, but she covered her body with a rough garment of goat's wool. She had a large household, but she prayed alone in her attic with just a few attendants. She was exceptionally beautiful, but she concealed this beauty from men and served her Spouse with her inner beauty.[99]

Pay heed to this, you widows who use the uncomfortable, narrow straits in which your household finds itself as an excuse for living a soft life, you whom not even poverty can teach modesty. Behold the noble Judith, at the peak of her youth and beauty, a wealthy woman; for three years and six months she had lived as a widow, right up until the day when she conceived in her mind that most beautiful deed. Do you suppose it was hard for a woman of her social status, her wealth, and her beauty to find a husband? There is no doubt but that she was sought after by many. Why then did she choose to remain a widow? Was it because she preferred to live as a widow in her own way rather than subject herself to a husband? For we see that some of those faced with this choice find a second marriage distasteful. But this was most definitely not the case here. Why then? She had not read Paul, but she had drunk the same spirit as Paul. The fact is that she knew that in marriage there was an element of servitude. Though this, she knew, was not so powerful as necessarily to distract from religion, none the less she knew too that it often happened that the woman who marries a husband is compelled in order to keep her husband happy to think constantly about those things that are of this world, whereas virgins and widows, since they are free from the jurisdiction of a man, have nothing to distract them from the Lord but can, if they wish, cling to him single-mindedly. Often an unchaste husband will undermine the chastity of his wife; a husband who is jealous of his property will impede her generosity towards the poor; the man given to other interests will get in the way of her prayers. This sort of thing can be excused on the grounds of wifely obedience, I admit, and indeed this kind of behaviour has been prescribed for wives; but still and all a wife lacks that most fortunate of liberties, the liberty of attending on the Lord beyond any distraction. St Paul perceived this when he said: 'to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.'[100] Only those women who have dedicated their entire selves to God can understand what this means. And since this is a product of the Spirit, it may happen to anyone anywhere if only he who alone has the power to do so will bless them with the proper disposition.

Since, moreover, according to the precepts of the Apostle a wife owes deference even to a bad husband[101] – stopping short of those things that constitute serious offences – a wife cannot along with Mary sit forever at the feet of Jesus, so that she might be nourished by the honeyed words of his conversation.[102] But our Judith, the lady of her own home, had freely constructed a secret cubicle in which she could be all alone and speak with the Lord, praying in secret, in keeping with evangelical doctrine, and expecting her reward not from other people but from him who sees what is secret.[103] She had a large household, but none the less she showed that the truly devout may find solitude even in the midst of a crowd. What others may do in their own rooms, they alone know: but there Judith prayed. The bedroom of a widow should be nothing but a place of prayer, and a kind of temple that knows no guilt but is consecrated to modesty, thanksgiving, holy thoughts, and pious prayers. She had prepared this chamber in the attic, that is to say, in the upper part of the house: for it was fitting that the body of someone whose mind daily contemplated flight into the heavens should also be far from the earth. For the Holy Spirit was sent to those who were praying and fasting in the upper room.[104] And Peter praying in his attic saw a vision sent down from heaven.[105] Anna, the widow in the gospel, almost overcome by age, persevered in the temple,[106] but a very young widow is nowhere safer than in a secret chamber. For this reason Judith wrapped a coarse woolen garment about her loins, fasting all the days of her life, except for sabbaths, new moons, and other holy days, on which days fasting was forbidden among the Jews; because she fasted, she was filled with holy sentiments; if from time to time she ate a little, it was for purposes of religion, not for purposes of nourishment.[107] If this example does not carry enough force today to persuade us to fast daily, surely it should serve to embarrass certain widows who never miss any social occasion, who waste the whole day first in breakfast, then dinner, then tea, of course, and supper, and even more food late in the evening – the while imagining that their modesty is beyond reproach, and that they are proper widows.

Now let us join together in considering Judith's companions, for these offer a key to understanding the character and values of the lady of the house. She spent a great deal of time in a secret chamber with her female attendants and was their teacher in holiness; her home was nothing but a school of piety. You would not have found youths there with their hair all curled by the iron, reeking of perfume, with lewd eyes and wanton tongues, nor the sort of young girls who would be likely to excite these youths by the way they look at them, the way they act, the way they move: this wealthy home did not resound with dances, silly games, and elaborate banquets. No mention is made of children – wherefore the woman's zeal for modesty is all the more remarkable, as among the Jews sterility was held in lower esteem even than widowhood.

She had as both serving-maids and disciples young girls whose efforts Judith did not waste by looking in the mirror, by fixing her hair, by making up her face, or by having them sprinkle her with perfume or fan her; rather they spent all their time either in prayers or in reading sacred books or in serious conservations or working with their hands or doing charitable deeds for the poor. She wore the clothing of a widow, which she laid aside only for a brief time, and that not for her own pleasure but rather for the sake of serving her country: only then finally did she step into a fancy dress.[108] And even this she put on not to capture the eyes of the nobility but to slay an enemy who threatened the greatest danger both to the holy state and to divine religion. The fact that Judith did this, consequently, must not be cited as an example to be followed (unless, of course, by divine inspiration and for a cause equally compelling). Much more blameworthy are they who abandon the trappings of widowhood for the sake of a wedding or some feast. It was for this motive that Judith put on a fine dress: for the sake of saving her country, so that it was not so much a dress as a snare and a trap. For the enemy who was to be deceived was a formidable one, and it was appropriate for that huge monster who seemed to put himself on a par with God himself to fall by the hand of a woman – appropriate that he who was accustomed to lay snares for the modesty of others should be taken by the genius of a woman. Judith put on this dress, then, in order to undertake a deed more beautiful by far than any other. For the protection of her integrity, however, she wore another sort of dress.

Is there then a kind of clothing that becomes a married woman but not a widow? Most certainly there is. For although a modest and simple style is also becoming to married women and is, according to the saying of St Peter, an expression of the faith that they profess, since the true beauty of a Christian woman is buried deep within her inner self,[109] none the less a reasonably elegant outfit can be justified on the grounds that married women are dressing up to be admired by their husbands; but no such justification can be found for widows. In married women simplicity in dress is praised; widows are not so much to be praised for practising it as vilified if they violate it.

Someone will ask: 'What has clothing to do with anything?' Clothing is the external manifestation of an individual. From the way a person dresses his body, his true nature can be inferred: for the body is the clothing of the spirit within. The manner of a person's dress reveals the extent to which he castigates the flesh; and if simplicity of dress is not absolutely essential to the chastity of a widow, it certainly helps to ward off the eyes of young men to whose view clothing often sets off the body beneath it so that they desire what they should not. And so it can happen that someone's reputation may suffer even if in fact her chastity has remained secure, and although a widow's chastity may be safe, someone else's may be in danger.

Now someone may ask: What sort of clothing becomes a widow? I will not describe here the colour or the cut. Indeed this would not be possible, since different countries at different times have taken opposite views in the matter of shades and style, hold some in high esteem and look down on others; some things are hopelessly inappropriate in one place and quite proper in others. Among some peoples a white dress is used in times of mourning, among others in times of celebration – of triumph, for example. Today in Spain there is no colour more precious or held in higher honour than black; a white dress that one might have expected to be used for a wedding or a victory celebration now is looked down upon, except when used in the sacred liturgy. Once vermilion was the most glorious among the different kinds of purple; now nothing is more disdained. What dress then shall we give to our widow? One becoming her time and place, which neither clamours for attention by its affected shabbiness, nor by its new-fangled style makes a spectacle of the woman who wears it, nor by its elegance and cost casts doubt upon the modesty of its wearer; which covers those parts of the body upon which men cannot gaze without danger to chastity; simple, that is to say, and conspicuous for neither its high nor its low price. Account must be taken of the individual's rank and status, certainly as far as price is concerned. What will become a royal widow, for example, might not become a commoner. In general, no clothing adorns a widow more appropriately than clothing that shows no adornment but is worn only for practical and modest purposes – practical, because it wards off the harm that might come from the cold, and modest, because it covers those parts that provoke the lust inherent in men.

Someone at this juncture may be thinking to himself: 'Why don't you preach this sermon to those who have committed themselves to perpetual chastity? What do these things have to do with those who are destined to be married?' The fact is, just as a virgin who is raised for a chaste and honourable marriage is not to be brought up differently from the way in which she would be raised if she had declared her intention of remaining perpetually celibate – in fact perhaps she should be raised with more care, lest she attract any sinister gossip before her marriage – so a widow who is preserving herself for a second marriage should not omit while she is living as a widow any of the behaviour that brings honour to widows. For who would not detest the sort of people who raise their daughters not as parents bringing them up for a chaste marriage but as a panderer brings girls up for financial gain? The woman who was not a proper virgin will not be a proper wife either. How will a woman behave with modesty towards her husband if she has learned shameless behaviour from her parents? Marriage among Christians, as Paul has recommended, should be 'honourable, and the marriage bed undefiled,'[110] full of modesty and very similar in fact to virginity. No dowry recommends a woman more than chastity and modesty.

Between a widow who will remarry and a woman who has taken a vow of perpetual chastity there is no difference save the period of time involved; their lives differ only in their rationale, not in their nature. Adorned by her strength of character, a widow who is horrified by the very thought of remarrying will find a worthy husband more quickly than one who seeks adornment in her clothing. She brings a great enough dowry who carries with her a trousseau of modesty, chastity, and decorous behaviour. If she has declared her intention of living in perpetual celibacy, why is she provoking men's glances? Or for whom is she cultivating herself when she has chosen Christ for her spouse?

Now let us also consider the dining habits of this wealthy widow Judith. She brought along with her one attendant on whom she imposed the burden of a wine-skin, a little bottle of oil, some barley, cakes of dried fruit, some bread, and some cheese – you can tell from this what were the rustic delights of that day. Probably too she led an even more frugal existence at home. With this sustenance she fasted daily. Let those step forward who deny that they are able to endure the fast of a single day unless they have started out in the morning with six different kinds of fish. Judith daily broke the whole day's fast with barley and some vegetables.

As I have said, moreover, there is a place for decorous behaviour even in the middle of revelry, if one is for some reason absolutely compelled to partake in some such event. We read how that most illustrious woman Elizabeth the landgrave of Hesse concealed her fasting in the middle of a banquet by a clever ruse – the enjoyment on her face, the pleasantness of her speech, the gracious way she attended to things.[111] By all this she deceived her fellow banqueters so that nobody perceived that she was not eating. Now here you have an example not only of restraint but also of religion. She took care that she would never be compelled to touch anything of which divine law forbade the eating. Thus her conduct stands as a reproach to us in our own rebelliousness – we who eat all the more eagerly those foods that the authority of the church forbids us to eat on certain days precisely because they are forbidden.[112] Just as those who judiciously change their eating habits for sound reasons are to be excused, by the same token nobody who is truly religious can countenance that sort of insolence.

Well then, widows, you have had set before you the life of Judith; now listen to her reputation of equally untarnished glory. For though it behoves both virgins and married women to guard their reputations, even more must this be of concern to widows, for this achievement is all the more beautiful on account of its special difficulty – indeed, by it they will be in good repute with God and mortals on every occasion. A good name is a more valuable possession than costly perfumes. This is the honour, this the singular adornment of the female sex. And in fact the Scriptures are not silent regarding this blessing, adding that Judith possessed an illustrious reputation in all quarters – not because she dined in splendour, but 'because she greatly feared the Lord,'[113] and these words represent the highest compliment the Scriptures can pay to piety.

It is wonderful to have a good name among all good people, but it is by far the most wonderful thing of all to have a name on which the wicked are unable to cast the slightest aspersion. 'There was no one,' the Scriptures say, 'who would say a harsh word about her.'[114] And what in this life, might I add, is really safe from the tongues of scurrilous people? An outstanding and unerring probity in one's life scarcely wins for one the kind of reputation that St Paul none the less required of a bishop – that he should have a good reputation not only among Christians but also among pagans and Jews.[115] Nor was he silent on this topic in discussing the good qualities of widows, saying: 'having a reputation for good works.'[116] A good name is a great treasure – but more fragile than any glass, since nothing is more easily damaged or less easily repaired.

But what means serve to preserve a good name? Why, the very same ones by which goodness itself is preserved. To tell the truth, nothing is more useful in building a solid reputation than being precisely that which you would have others think you are. The principal virtue of a widow is propriety in all aspects of life. This propriety is to be found not only in her style of life, her appearance, and her bearing, but even in her retinue. Who, having a mistress like Judith, would have dared to drink too much or to behave lasciviously or to gamble under her roof? There are voices everywhere, especially where evil is concerned: countenance, eyes, gait, the bearing of the head and other movements, laughter, one's male and female attendants, children and companions – all proclaim the character of the lady of the house. A widow must therefore always and everywhere lead her life in such a manner than no part of it is open to the reproaches of gossips, and her integrity in all aspects of life must be so great that even the wicked should fear to speak ill of her. And it is not enough either to have abstained from all evil; rather, according to the teaching of Paul, she must even beware of 'any appearance of evil.'[117]

But rumour, you may object, is a shameless and evil thing and does not always spare even the innocent. I concede this; but the rumour that arises out of thin air soon vanishes of its own accord, and its very falseness serves only to make one's innocence more strikingly apparent in everyone's eyes. When, on the other hand, the rumour is grounded in reality, it grows constantly and 'acquires strength in its course,' as Virgil says.[118] Women whose behaviour is immodest, whose speech is improper, who spend a good part of the day on powders, rouges, mascara, cards, gaming, feasting, dancing, who take delight in the constant company of well-groomed youths, who have badly brought up children, who have a household full of rogues – these people have no right to take umbrage at gossip. And if it is impossible to see to it that nobody speaks ill of us, at least we should take care that nobody should do so with good reason. To have an unblemished reputation, moreover, is the singular glory of the female sex. Many people spoke ill of Christ; nobody dared speak a harsh word about his Virgin Mother. For the Lord himself protected her from the suspicion of disgrace by the formality of matrimony and by the false impression that Joseph was the baby's father.

Let a widow, then, who desires an unblemished reputation place before her eyes the example of the widow Judith and follow along in her footsteps. Why should I enumerate here the rest of this widow's virtues? Think of her patriotism, the authority she exercised among the elders and with the head of state himself. When she had summoned them to come to her, she restored their hope when they had given up, taught them when they were ignorant, fortified them with wise counsel when they were faltering. Finally, she alone, one single woman, effected by her piety a victory of which a huge army had despaired.

She brought back from the enemy camp the most splendid of trophies, but she ascribed the whole triumph to God and to her people; she herself once this most beautiful deed was accomplished returned to her simple garment of sackcloth. Here you may recognize the greatest bravery coupled with the greatest modesty, and the greatest wisdom with the greatest piety. It is in the nature of outstanding virtue to command reverence and respect from everybody. Judith was a woman, a widow; she ruled over no territory and held no public office. Nonetheless the elders of the people did not hesitate to go to her for advice: not even prince Uzziah himself scorned her aid. Afterwards Joakim the high priest deemed her worthy of a similar honour, setting out from Jerusalem for Bethulia in order to see her.[119] And the speech by which she exercised such influence over them – how full of authority it was, how uncharacteristic of a woman! 'What,' she asked, 'is this notion with which Uzziah has agreed, to hand the state over to the Assyrians if help does not come to you within five days? And who are you who make trial of the Lord? That is not the sort of speech that calls forth mercy; rather it is the kind that excites anger and fires the flames of wrath. Do you dare to tell the Lord the time for mercy and to determine on your own its day?'[120] The elders and the statesmen were reproved by a woman; and they endured it. What ultimately was holier than her advice? She invited penitence for what they had done; she showed that the mercy of the Lord was waiting for them; she taught that allegiance had to be transferred to him and that the calamities that had befallen them were to be ascribed to their own sins, and that they should not hasten to seek vengeance but rather take refuge in the mercy of the Lord. Who today would tolerate a woman's reproofs or advice? But the king and the elders not only tolerated Judith, they thanked her. For thus history has it: Uzziah and the priests said to her: 'All that you have said is true, and there is no fault to be found in your speeches. Now, therefore, pray for us, since you are a holy and God-fearing woman.'[121] But she in no way accepted as her due the praise for such an admirable deed. She ordered the elders to awake by their prayers the mercy of the Lord, so that he might look propitiously on the plans she had conceived, and to exhort the people to pray. Thus she prepared everybody to place their hope for the whole enterprise not in their own strength but in the goodness of the Almighty. Once the deed was done she assumed the role of a general, ordering the people to crush the enemy and scatter them.[122]

Finally, when she had won such an illustrious victory, she did not seek to have statues set up for her or to have triumphs celebrated; rather, she herself with the virgins and matrons sang a triumphal song to the Lord, who had given victory to his people.[123] None the less, whatever wealth or booty there was from the plundered home of Holofernes the people bestowed on Judith to honour her. But since this outstanding and heroic woman proclaimed that she looked down on wealth as much as on earthly glory, she consecrated as a dedicated offering[124] whatever wealth she received. She herself returned to her home neither prouder nor wealthier. With what a proud parade of words have eloquent men celebrated the virtues of certain commanders who, from their splendid victories, brought nothing but glory back to their own homes! But the person who wins praise and acclaim among mortals has carried away a huge reward. For about such people the Lord has also said: 'They have received their reward.'[125] How much more magnificent is what that triumphant woman accomplished, who, content simply with the knowledge of the good she had done, was indifferent to wealth and glory alike! Observe, too, that she did not think of remarrying even though she lived to the age of one hundred five. And so that you may see what praise she merited both for her clemency and for her frugality, note that she freed the only attendant that she had.[126]

She wished her burial to be as her life had been: for there are those whose desire for recognition not even death extinguishes. Did not a woman who had served the state so well deserve some conspicuous monument? But Judith was buried in the tomb of her husband Manasses.[127] She had embraced him alone with a chaste love, and death did not put an end to this bond between them: she knew that the better part of her husband yet lived and that at some time in the future they would be restored to the very same life they had once shared together.

Nor, I think, did the name of her husband altogether lack mystical significance. Manasses means 'necessity' or 'destined to oblivion.'[128] When Judith first married, she was yielding to necessity: the authority of her parents dictated it, the conventions of her people suggested it, the desire for offspring, which could not be realized without a husband, compelled it. (I say this because the ardour of youth is what moves some women to take husbands.) Finally, the woman who marries comes into the jurisdiction of her husband and thus submits herself to a necessity from which nothing can liberate her save her husband's death. This, therefore, is what it means that he was called 'necessity.'

But how is it fitting that he should be called 'given over to oblivion' in whose house she lived always and in whose tomb she wished to be buried? 'Although we learnt to know Christ in the flesh,' the Apostle said, 'still now we do not know him.'[129] He who does not know him whom he knew before indeed has forgotten him in some way. In this way Judith, who had first been joined to her husband in the flesh did not, when he died soon afterwards, cling to the memory of their carnal connection but rather loved him in a spiritual sense all the more ardently, and even when he was dead kept the same faith with him which she had promised him when he was alive.

What a very different picture is presented by women who are never able to forget their dead husbands, who at the slightest provocation renew their mourning, bursting into tears and lamenting all over again. But more shameless still are those whom neither a second nor even a third husband can shake off the memory of the first. When they feel slighted in any way, they reproach their new husbands with the character of their dead spouse, and the same man upon whom they looked down while he was alive they praise now that he is dead – not so that they may take pleasure in recalling his virtues but in order to harass their current mate. 'How much more attentive *he* was,' they exclaim, 'how much handsomer! When he was alive, how much more freedom and admiration I had – and how much more money!'

Those women cultivate the memory of their husbands best who forget the things of the flesh. She remembers her husband sufficiently who refuses to marry another and keeps her plighted troth to him as if he were not dead but simply away. She has forgotten her husband in a very fortunate way who, having married once for the sake of her parents, for nature, for offspring, perseveres in a life of chastity and who, once she has returned to her own guardianship, forgets the earlier pleasures she has known and dedicates herself entirely to delights of the spirit. This sort of forgetting is worthy of Christian widows. For there are some women who forget their husbands before they have buried them; others perish in their own tears.

There is a mean between these two extremes. Mourning is to be ended quickly, but fidelity scarcely ever – not because a wife owes this to a dead husband, but because modesty of the highest degree argues it. Judith's place of origin will not lack a message for us, since the divine Scriptures do not simply provide an account of things that have happened, as do merely secular volumes; rather in the actual letters of the words lies concealed some arcane wisdom if only someone will look closely at them with the curiosity that comes of piety.[130] She lived in Bethulia and was buried there. But what does Bethulia mean? 'A virgin chaste before the Lord.'[131] Many women are virgins in the eyes of the world who are unclean in the eyes of the Lord. There was a time when marrying a man in accord with the will of one's parents was praised as an act of obedience; to be joined to a husband on account of the desire for offspring constituted piety; to give no rein to lust in marriage, chastity. This itself is a kind of virginity, when a woman is chaste not before mortals but before the Lord, who looks not to the habits of the body but to the inclinations of the mind. According to tropology, however, whoever serves the Lord with a pure mind is a Bethulia, that is, 'a virgin chaste before the Lord,' as Paul meant when he said 'I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.'[132] This sort of chastity is grounded in three things: the sincerity of one's beliefs, the purity of one's feelings, and the piety of one's deeds.

The first order of business is to believe the right things, and never to deviate from the teachings of the Catholic church. This is the fount, the root, of all religion; if it is violated, nothing that is pure can follow. The next is that all human feelings should be ruled by the spirit, which wars with the flesh.[133] Right belief shows the way; love of God and one's neighbour is the Christian rule, to which all human affections should be ordered. It is this rule that spurs us to pious works. In this way is realized the prayer of Paul that the body and the soul and the spirit should be integrally joined together on the day of the Lord.[134] For this day probes the very inmost reaches of the human heart: and whoever on this day can stand that test is truly upright and has Bethulia as his native land. And anyone who ascribes everything good in her life to the one God and sings praises not to herself but to him will also be entitled to be called Judith, confessing her weakness and recognizing the beneficence of the Lord, who accomplishes for each individual whatever he wishes according to his own will.

Do you see how much material for my discourse the story of Judith has supplied, though I have touched on just a small portion of it? Anyone who has time to examine all the details and probe to the innermost recesses of the story – which it would be terribly time-consuming to review here – will find that there is no virtue of which Judith does not offer a conspicuous example, whether one is testing for chastity, or piety, or prudence, or trust in God, or courage, or modesty, or fortitude. The head of Holofernes, severed by the sword, is not so much offered for our contemplation that we should imitate Judith or any other widow, but that we might stand in admiration of them. And certainly it has the effect of startling widows out of their timidity when they see in this what value God placed upon assiduous prayer and sincere faith even in women.

There is nothing in the mysteries of Scripture that does not offer some kind of wisdom. If the historical sense of Scripture has little of profit, the allegorical has a great deal. For this is not an example to be followed by widows – to serve the state at the peril of their chastity or to lay snares for the enemy by their seductive glances.

But what Judith did to Holofernes, let all widows do unto Satan, who never ceases to mount the direst of perils against the holy city, which is the church, and against the people of God, who are all those who wish to 'live piously in Christ Jesus.'[135] With this enemy, O widows, you have an endless war to fight; this is the enemy who is to be ensnared. The Lord himself has taught you the way to ensnare him. Whoever anoints her face with oil so that she will not be perceived to fast is laying snares for Holofernes;[136] the person who gives alms in such a way that the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing, the person who prays secretly in a private room, is doing a good job of beguiling Holofernes.[137] In such pious deceptions we are to be prudent as serpents, as the gospel tells us.[138]

Let widows therefore keep Judith's picture before them – on the walls of their rooms, certainly, but also fixed firmly in their minds; and let them contemplate themselves in her reflection, those who live in self-indulgence, spending – or rather wasting – the better part of the day among girls who live all dressed up, among wanton youths, in banquets, dances, gambling, making up their faces, amongst stories of questionable modesty. Let them blush before her image, saying to themselves: this Jewess, on whom the light of the gospel had not yet shone, neither the examples of illustrious women nor the exhortation of the apostles had inspired to chastity – for she had not heard Christ crying out: 'Blessed are those who have castrated themselves for the sake of the kingdom of God';[139] when this woman was pre-eminent in such signal holiness, what is it then appropriate for me to do, a Christian woman, instructed by so many precepts, edified by so many examples, spurred on by the promise of such great rewards? Judith fasted and prayed in sackcloth, and I slumber in self-indulgence.

Well now, if you have had a good look at this illustrious and heroic woman, come, let us bring before you a woman who is in a sense Judith's own sister – Deborah, who though a single woman played for the people of Israel the role of three men: prophet, judge, and general.[140] She resolved the disputes among the citizens, she prescribed through prophecy what had to be done, saying with great authority to Barak: 'The Lord God of Israel has commanded you.'[141] Setting out herself to war, she gave courage to the generals. Will not the competence of this woman rightly overwhelm in embarrassment certain widows who are too listless even to manage their own households, bringing up their children ignobly and giving rein to the indulgence of their servants of both sexes?

Now let that woman of Zarephath, hostess and pupil of Elijah, step forward and teach us hospitality to neighbours and loyalty to God. That woman was no Israelite but came from Sidon; and none the less when by chance she encountered an Israelite prophet she did not neglect the duties of hospitality, but when she was called ran forward to offer water to the thirsty; and when the prophet called after her that she should bring a little bread too in order to relieve his hunger, she replied simply that she had no more flour at home than she could scoop up in her hand, and a little oil, which she had set aside to prepare for herself and her son, and that they would die of hunger when that little that remained was gone. When Elijah insisted that out of that tiny bit she should first make for him a little bread and then prepare some for herself and her son, since in the future they would lack neither a jar of meal or a cruse of oil, she did not make excuses for herself, and turn her back, saying: 'I know what I have, but I do not know what I will have in the future. First let me look out for myself; if you can promise a constant supply of meal to others, first give what you promise to me, and I will be unstinting from my full sack of grain; now we are in as narrow straits as you: I owe it as a duty to be more solicitous for myself and my dear ones than for a stranger.'[142]

No, it was nothing of this kind that this pagan woman replied. Finding assurances in Elijah's promises, she hurried home without the slightest hesitation, baked a loaf of bread, perhaps even with her child weeping, and brought it to the prophet. There can be no doubt but that all this was done according to the will of God. For God was able to provide water from wherever he willed for his prophet, God who had kept him alive in the desert for so long with bread and meats supplied by the ministration of ravens.[143] But he wished in a foreign-born woman to show a rare example of hospitality and faith so that he might have a widow with whom to reproach his people, when they not only failed to offer welcome and refreshment to the sole prophet promised by Moses, who proclaimed far better things than had Elijah, but even crucified him.

From the same territory of Sidon came forth that astonishing Canaanite woman who proclaimed to us, by her persistent cries unto the Lord and the constancy of her faith, which led him to cure her daughter, how much force assiduous prayer has with God when it is accompanied by untainted faith.[144] And it is probable that she was a widow, since there is mention of her daughter but none of her husband, to whom it would more appropriately have fallen to rush forward and demand the Lord's attention on behalf of his daughter's health. Both these women foreshadowed in type the church to be congregated from the gentiles, which broke into the kingdom of heaven only on the merit of faith.

There remains to be discussed Naomi, to whom exile brought hunger, the death of her husband widowhood, the death of her sons bereavement.[145] To this triple wound was added the double burden of old age and poverty, either one a weighty care in the eyes of the world; but she was nurtured and supported by her daughter-in-law Ruth, who held her mother-in-law in the same honour as a natural parent, and who cherished her so much indeed that she followed the poor and aged woman even at the cost of leaving her native land, her blood relatives, her friends, and, last but far from least, the gods and the religion of her ancestors. On Naomi's advice, Ruth found a husband; and in turn through this girl's generosity Naomi found both shelter and sustenance; and, finally, in place of her own children she had the very sweetest of grandsons – Obed, the ancestor of King David. For when the baby was born Ruth immediately placed him in Naomi's lap, so that the older woman would not feel that she was sterile but rather would have the solace of her line being continued. She accepted a child from her daughter-in-law just the way Sara did from her maid – but with a happier outcome.

And so, the story goes, Naomi was nurse and attendant to the newborn baby. Nor did the congratulations of the neighbouring women lack a prophetic element, for they said: 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left your family without an heir; and may his name be renowned in Israel, and may you have him as a consolation to your spirit and as a support in your old age. For from your daughter-in-law there has been born one who will love you, and he is much better to you than if you had seven sons.'[146] And giving thanks the women said to her: 'A son is born to Naomi.'[147] Ruth in fact did not begrudge giving up to Naomi these closest of personal ties. Indeed, earlier, whenever she had collected anything from the harvest, she had carried it to her mother-in-law, and had also saved for her leftover food from meals, laying aside something from her own meals so as to make sure to alleviate another's need. By this we see how little God abandons widows 'who are true widows.'[148] If they do not find in their children the reward of procreation, they find it granted them by others in the pleasurable duties of the education and upbringing of their children. Naomi had no hope of a husband nor of the consolation of children, but none the less because of the humanity and compassion of a Moabite woman it happened that she had no need to long for a husband or children.

Very little suffices to sustain a modest widow. And indeed she who has supported a widow as the guiding force of her youth has given much less than she has received. Paul taught that the person who is catechized should share with her catechist all her goods, nor did he think it inappropriate that those who sow spiritual seeds should reap temporal rewards.[149] Rightly do we proclaim the piety of Ruth in giving to her mother-in-law whatever rewards she could – Ruth who would have done more if she had been able. But how much greater was what she received from her mother-in-law! From Naomi's instruction she learnt that the gods of her own people were demons; that one God only was to be worshipped, one God who had created the world and who directs its course. She had learned that a Messiah would come in accord with the oracles of the prophets – a Messiah who when all idols had been destroyed would summon all the nations of the world to eternal salvation and so, just as the wild olive shoot is grafted onto the olive tree, so out of this Moabite was made an Israelite, and out of a demon-worshipper a handmaiden of the living God.[150] Finally, she was elevated to such a degree of dignity that the church proclaims her name in recounting the genealogy of Christ, and she is celebrated as an ancestor of the highest king and prophet.[151] Could what she did for Naomi possibly be great enough to deserve this in exchange? Let us consider now the singular prudence of this widow Naomi. When she sought to return to her fatherland, both daughters-in-law offered to accompany her; but she by a long series of refusals made trial of their constancy, differing greatly in this from the Scribes and Pharisees, whom the Lord scolded because they would traverse sea and land to make him a single proselyte, and when they had won him, would make him a child of hell twice over.[152]

Nobody should be enticed to the Christian religion or to the declaration of perpetual chastity or any similar way of life by human devices and promises, nor should we place faith in people's first reactions, particularly in the case of young boys and girls; rather we must reserve judgment about these responses until it can be determined whether the inspiration comes from God. For it is best when one has put one's hand to the plow not to proceed until one has looked backwards to see what one has left behind, since human passions, after a little time has passed, often grow cold or are turned in another direction.[153] Holy desires, on the other hand, which are placed in us by the spirit of Christ, grow constantly more fervent with the passing of time, and if you argue with people about them and seek to dissuade them from their beliefs, they bubble over just like limestone when cold water is poured over it. How much more gravely therefore do they sin who not only with sweet-talking and deceit but even with threats and harsh admonitions cast unformed and innocent youths into a net from which there is no escape.[154] What happened? Orpah, whose name is derived from the word for 'pride,' returned to her native gods; Ruth, whose name means 'she who hastens,' was all the more determined after Naomi's attempts to dissuade her, and, having been rendered still more animated, hastened to Bethlehem.[155] Naomi showed to them by her own example what it means to have no hope of marriage, and showed how her own poverty would be aggravated yet further by consorting with other unfortunates. This was not real dissuasion, but rather a kind of exploration; for she wished both of them to be converted to the worship of the true God. And so she returned who would not have been able to endure had she gone along. Once she had departed, Naomi once more exhorted Ruth to follow her sister-in-law's example, nor would she accept the girl as a companion on the journey she was about to undertake until she had examined her constancy thoroughly. And this is no mean sort of prudence.

Again, consider with me the singular piety of this young woman. In order to supply nourishment for her mother-in-law, she participated of her own free will in someone else's harvest, collecting ears of corn by following along behind the regular harvesters. For the humanity of the Mosaic law granted this to the poor. She did not turn to a wicked trade; she did not blush to acknowledge her extreme need; it was not too much for her to go harvesting as a foreign woman among strangers. Piety had overcome natural modesty. And does this vary, you may ask, from common begging? She who did what she had done would not have refused to help her mother-in-law by begging bread from door to door. Nor would she have dared to do it unless she had asked permission. The reverence of the younger woman for the older and the understanding between them were far greater than one commonly finds today between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law even when the husband in question is alive; but not even the death of her husband put an end to the piety of this girl.[156]

The most abundant evidence of her obedience to her mother-in-law lies in her willingness secretly to throw herself by Naomi's command at the feet of Boaz as he slept in the field. And, lest the suspicion of unchastity enter anyone's mind, be it known that the entire matter was conducted by the dispensation of God: it was not pleasure that was sought, as far as Naomi was concerned, but rather the generation of heirs; and as for Ruth, a husband was sought so that he might support her mother-in-law; offspring were desired who might console and care for the poor old woman; and, to put an end to all suspicion, note that Christ wished to be born from this line. It was not human scheming that was operative here but rather the will of God. Indeed Ruth, when she was ordered to do something that had the appearance of sin and whose outcome might be most unfortunate if the man she came upon were not virtuous, none the less did not disobey her mother-in-law but said rather: 'Whatever you command, that will I do.'[157] Now should not Christian daughters today be ashamed to be disrespectful to their Christian mothers, when a Moabite woman treated her mother-in-law so well? Their family relationship had been dissolved, but still natural affection lived on and thrived. Death breaks the chains of the marriage; but true love has no bounds and alone remains even after death. And so Ruth revered Naomi not as a mother-in-law but as a mother and a teacher.

Whatever the spirit of Christ cements together is eternal; whatever is human is temporal. All mothers-in-law should behave like Naomi towards their daughters-in-law: they should lead them away from the Moabites, that is to say, from the inclinations of their youth, and lead them into Bethlehem, that is to say, the house of bread;[158] for bread means the divine word, which is Christ Jesus himself; and satiated with this bread, they will happily bring forth offspring worthy of Christ. This mothers-in-law will, however, bring about if they conduct themselves in such a way towards young girls that they are both loved and feared on account of their virtue. But today most people treat their daughters-in-law so badly that they are rightly despised. For the integrity of one's life wins respect and kind deeds win affection. But whenever those who by their dissolute lives invite their daughters-in-law to follow their example then issue some unreasonable command to satisfy one of their whims, they try to fall back on their status as mothers-in-law and as matrons deserving respect; then if their command is not fulfilled to the letter, they add threats to it. The same is true of mothers who raise their children improperly. What effrontery to exact respect from those whom they have taught the opposite!

How many things this blessed Naomi taught us; but if we look more closely, we will discover even more examples of virtue in Ruth, when we read that she ate nothing in the field except some barley-groats that she had prepared for herself; and, lest you imagine that there was absolutely nothing more appetizing in the field, know that with the permission of Boaz she dipped her little morsel of bread in vinegar and carried to Naomi the leftovers of this meal. No virtue should be dearer to widows than sobriety and frugality. If you seek something to drink, you have the spectacle and example of this widow, whom, when she was thirsty, Boaz allowed to go to the vessels and drink there from the same water whence the boys of his own household drank.

Now someone will object that this meagre sustenance may not be suitable for everyone. I concede that another sort of sustenance may be indicated by climate, habit, and in some cases upbringing, and custom that has become second nature, as it were; but none is forbidden to lead a life of austerity, without which both her modesty and her reputation are in the greatest danger. When Paula, the mother of Eustochium, was old and sick, none the less she could not be induced to drink wine even by the admonitions of Jerome or by the authority of the bishop. What shall we then call the effrontery of certain widows who waste a good part of the day in lavish banquets and drinking parties, whose fastidious tastes even the most accomplished cook can scarcely satisfy?

There is yet more that I would like to say about Naomi, when I consider that the description of how she changed her name is not without significance. For when she returned to her native land and heard the voices of the people crying out: 'This is that illustrious Naomi,' that is to say, 'beautiful one,' she replied: 'Why do you call me Naomi?' – a word which means 'beautiful one' – 'when it would be more accurate to call me Mara – that is to say, 'bitter one' – 'since the Lord has afflicted me?'[159] It is unfitting for widows to strive for popular praise of their beauty. What else are women hunting for except to hear 'There is that illustrious "beautiful one"' when they go out with their hair carefully done, smothered in make-up? Now those of them who have professed a life of chastity are warring dishonourably with their own vow; and even for those who have not, none the less it is unfitting for a widow to court a man – a widow who ought more properly to be courted herself. Though feelings between spouses should certainly be equally strong, none the less a modest deference is especially appropriate to the female sex. It is for men to court and for women to be courted – or, better still, to be seized forcefully. The ancients, indeed, in order to underline the proper modesty of betrothed girls, practised a solemn ritual by which the groom would snatch the young girl as if by force from her mother's bosom. But if it is unbecoming for virgins to court a husband, how much more unfitting will this be for a widow? And the truth is that whoever is often seen in public, and has made an effort about her appearance because she knows she will be seen by men, is behaving flirtatiously. As long as her husband is living, it is permissible to be a 'Naomi,' that is to say, 'beautiful one,' for in that case a woman has someone for whom to dress up. But once her husband has died there is nothing left to do but commend the appearance of her soul to the eyes of God, to which nothing appears more beautiful than countenance and clothing that exhibit modest, purity, and contempt of the world.

Someone is bound to say that a life of mourning is no life at all. On the contrary, if we accept the saying of St Paul, 'a widow living in self-indulgence is not alive but rather dead.'[160] No Christian, moreover, has any excuse for living a life of pleasure, since the life of us all is nothing but an exile, a military service filled with hard labour and great dangers; but in those cases in which people absolutely cannot refrain from self-indulgence – well, this licence can perhaps be granted to a married woman, but not to a widow. And since nobody is forced to remain a widow, all the baser is it to recoil from that which you have chosen for yourself.

To conclude: Naomi, after she had changed her name and begun to be called Mara, did not so much abjure delights as exchange certain delights for others. If you will compare those delights she left behind with the new ones she received, *bone Jesu*, what an enormous difference! How much more excellent is the mind than the body, and how much sweeter, purer, and more stable are the delights of the spirit than those of the flesh. The joy that Christ as a spouse breathes into the souls of those women who have dedicated themselves entirely to him is incalculable. But even if we were to suppose that the mourning of widows were assuaged by no earthly consolation, what sane person would not acknowledge that a brief period of mourning is not very much to pay for joy that is eternal?

If we are enjoying the fruit that we have gathered from the contemplation of Naomi, come, let us return to the delightful spectacle of the very brave mother of the Maccabee brothers,[161] whose name is unknown among mortals but – which is much more fortunate – is inscribed rather in the Book of Life.[162] Indeed, among Christians to hunt after no praise for one's good deeds is considered deserving of the highest praise. If from time to time people are given names according to some particular virtue or vice in which they excel, most rightly would you call this woman 'Piety' or 'Perseverance.' Stand closer now, widows, and hear what this blessed widow has to teach you.

It is the singular virtue of both married women and widows to bring their children up properly, a duty that indeed the Apostle considered so important that he viewed it as due compensation for the sin of the first mother, who was her husband's guide and teacher in prevarication and brought forth universal death before she produced any children. For he wrote to Timothy: 'Adam was not seduced, but rather his prevaricator of a wife; none the less she will be saved through the generations of sons, if they live in faith and in love and in holiness joined with sobriety.'[163] You have, mothers, the formula for bringing up your children, not from Aristotle or Xenophon but rather from the Apostle, through whose mouth God speaks to you.[164] The essential element of Christian upbringing is faith, as I said before, which must be instilled in tender minds by parents at an early age; to faith adheres charity, which ministers unto it. Next, since in the course of human life many things happen which may on occasion corrupt a person, comes holiness, which consists in the avoidance of vices and the enactment of pious works. For nothing can be holy and pure unless it arises from these two fonts, faith and charity; but nobody perseveres in doing good works unless a fundamental sobriety of life is present, sobriety that has as its companions modesty, fasting, and prayer. Amongst all the virtues lurks the threat of arrogance, and if any place is given to it, the whole edifice will collapse. Self-indulgence, however, is the teacher of all evil; and it is controlled by fasting. Nor are we in any condition to pray if our bodies are weighed down by over-indulgence and torpor.

Excellence in these virtues is what mothers ought to hand down to their children if they want to attain eternal salvation – something which is by no means guaranteed to them unless their children persevere in these skills. The first order of business is to teach what is best. Second, one must see to it that the young are not seduced into a lower way of life by the company or encouragement of the wicked. To be sure, the ultimate outcome of all this is not entirely in the hands of parents; but parental vigilance is of such great moment in this matter that Paul thought that parents should be blamed if children neglected the practice of piety.[165] How could it have come about that these seven youths presented their bodies to all manner of torments with such presence of mind unless their holiest of mothers had instilled and implanted deep within them from their tenderest years the notion that death is a thousand times preferable to violating the law of God; that those who die in this way have perished most felicitously; that of such even the bodies do not perish, for they will be wonderfully glorified in the resurrection? Having drunk in these convictions with their mother's milk, with unflinching minds they denounce the tyrant and take no stock of the torments that were heaped upon them.[166]

Let mothers be judged by this example who seem to themselves to love their children no end when in reality they hate them, accustoming them to culinary delicacies so that their palates are more cultivated than their minds, so that they excel more in criticizing the speech of others than in speaking well themselves, who teach them to dress vainly and practise wickedness, who reward them with a kiss if they have done something particularly naughty or said something particularly licentious. Later when their children come to puberty these parents reinforce their unacceptable desires and supply them with money for wicked and decadent things, and imagine that these children have been taught very well if they can dance gracefully and if they can conduct themselves appealingly at parties and are skilled at dice and other pointless games. O mothers more harmful than any stepmothers! In what way would an enemy's treatment of your children differ from your own? It would be distasteful to mention here certain women who, abominable to say, transform themselves from mothers into madams and prostitute their daughters for money – people whom I would list not as mothers or even as human beings but rather as monsters.

Nor is it sufficient to use words to prescribe to your children what they must do; you yourself must provide an example. Whatever parents do in the sight of their children they teach to their children. Nature has inclined that unformed time of life to imitation; people of that age will act out whatever they see even before they have been taught the difference between right and wrong. Mothers consequently must arrange their whole lives in such a way that whatever they do, particularly in view of their children, should serve as an example of piety. Those are to be approved, I affirm, who see to it that their sons or daughters are trained in literature and the liberal arts. Various pursuits should occupy that malleable time of life – waxen, as Horace calls it[167] – so that the young do not slip into base things; humane studies form and cultivate the mind and prepare for the understanding of weightier matters. And I would praise those who, though the family be in no financial straits, none the less see to it that their children be taught some handiwork. In this way they avoid idleness, something especially harmful and the teacher of all manner of baseness. If some chance, moreover, should cast them into poverty, 'all lands welcome skills,' as the old proverb puts it.[168] But nothing should be learnt earlier or more carefully than piety. Progress in it must be made throughout one's life, and its exercise accompanies us up to our last breath. The children of such a woman can contemn death and suffering more painful than death, while the youth of today have no fortification against pleasures, rage, and other temptations. What can explain this if not different upbringings?

Now please contemplate with me the fortitude of this woman. In books of history, one discovers that there have been many parents who bore bravely the tormenting of their own bodies but could not endure the torturing of their children. This woman, however, so often tortured and indeed slain in her children, remained steadfast, and in fact when the last and youngest was to be brought forth, the resolve of the tyrant began to waver, moved by the boy's youth – youth that even wild beasts spare – and moved by his gentle disposition. The mother was summoned; she was advised to take action on behalf of the safety of at least this one if only to keep one alive safe for herself so that she would not live in complete bereavement. What then did our heroine do? For her part, she feared the king's mercy more than his savagery. Frightened lest the youth's tender age, terrified by the horrible examples of his brothers or corrupted by the blandishments of the tyrant, would lead him to purchase his life at the price of his piety, she announced that she would do her best to protect the youth. She was telling the truth; for she came to him and encouraged him in the most forceful language to imitate the example of his brothers and purchase eternal salvation with bodily death. She could not have given her son better advice. More elaborate tortures were brought to bear – which only had the effect of demonstrating the youth's courage. This woman, this mother, this widow looked upon this spectacle with dry eyes. Did she not love her sons? Indeed she did. But devotion to offspring was conquered by devotion to God. One nail drove out another, as they say; the adamantine drove out the iron.[169] She loved her son passionately, but more wisely than an ordinary mother would. If her sons had deserted divine law on account of fear of agonizing punishments, then truly they would have perished and truly would she have had cause for unmitigated grief. But, as it was, she knew their salvation was assured and in the last analysis could take satisfaction in having borne such children. Why am I now praising the fact that she provoked the tyrant's cruelty against herself so that she might join herself to the company of her sons? It is scarcely believable that a woman should contemn dire tortures or death; but what she had endured in connection with her sons was much greater.

In view of this, what shall we make of those mothers who mourn forever the deaths of their sons? Indeed, it is right and proper to mourn when a son dies in a brawl, in drunkenness, having failed to repent of his sins; when he dies without having confessed his crimes or been absolved by a priest, and prepared for his journey by none of the other sacraments of the church, since, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah, 'with the burial of an ass he shall be buried, putrefied, and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.'[170] Oh, yes; that sort of son is to be mourned because of the living death that was his life – for when he was alive was he truly dead and buried. If he dies as a youth, how they lament him: 'Oh, how unfair! He died before his time! He was in the flower of his life!' And that impious lamentation scarcely stops short of reproaches against God himself. O worse than pagan souls! When he learnt wickedness all too soon, when he ran after women, when he gambled, when he hastened to become a soldier before it was time – then, when his behaviour called for every kind of lamentation, he was applauded instead. The death of the body, if we are steadfast Christians, is not in any way to be mourned; if we are in any way Christian, little time need be given over to the vulnerability of the human condition.

According to the example of this extraordinarily brave heroine, ladies, lay aside any natural weakness in your disposition; taken on the minds and hearts of men, and do not let the infirmity of your sex discourage you. 'For in Christ there is neither male nor female but a wholly new creature.'[171] Even those holy Maccabees were young, but their faith provided them with manly strength. Their mother was a woman; but wherever the spirit of Christ is present, there one's own nature gives way to the nature of the creator. This example should serve as all the sharper a spur to incite people to the religious education of their children since it was a Jewish woman who did these things. She did not know Christ except as promised through the dimly seen visions of prophets. She had heard from the Pharisees about the resurrection to come, but Christ, 'the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep,'[172] had not yet risen. What then is appropriate for Christian women to do, on whom the truth has shone so much more clearly by means of the gospel, for whom the way is wide open by so very many precepts and examples to receive the richer grace of the Lord that has been prepared for them if they will offer themselves to him?

O Mary, glory and adornment of all widows, these things are ample to offer instruction to widows, but I should like to go back over them one by one and summarize the particular excellences that we have found in each example. Let us go back and contemplate the blessed old woman Anna,[173] the daughter of Phanuel, almost blinded by age, but most perspicacious in so far as she saw with the eyes of her mind: though her body was frozen with age, 'in spirit she was positively burning.'[174] She had in fact the gift of prophecy. You see that Paul was correct in maintaining that 'in Christ there is no distinction according to rank, but whoever is grafted onto Christ is a new creation.'[175] What can be more sublime than prophets? This woman was lifted up to be their equal in dignity, who served as a warning wind, as they say, to the Saviour, privately announcing him whom a little later John would preach publicly. 'She had lived for seven years with her husband from the time of her virginity.'[176] When he died she remained a widow to the age of eighty-four.

The first thing of which we must make note is that Anna carried with her to her marriage her virginity, something that I am not certain that all women do today who are married with their hair loosed.[177] And though she had lived with her husband only a few years and had had no children by him – for there is no mention of any offspring – none the less, though just a girl when she was widowed, she did not remarry but transferred her entire attention to the love of the Messiah who was to come, making clear that her first marriage was the product of duty, not inclination; for if she cared for the state of marriage, she would have sought to re-enter it, being still only a girl. But for what reason did she refrain from seeking another marriage? Surely not so that she could live more at liberty, free from the yoke of a husband? To be sure, this reason, as I have said, induces many women to perpetual celibacy – women whom Paul does not accept as widows but rather would prefer to marry and become matrons.[178] In the last analysis she alone is a true widow whom love of piety restrains from marriage. What was it then that spurred this girl to celibacy?

The Holy Spirit had given indications to this widow that in the future while she was still alive that illustrious infant awaited for so many centuries would be born. In this expectation she turned aside from whatever pleasures this world might offer, and in this hope she experienced neither the temptation of youth nor the burden of old age. Where then did she spend her time? Pay close attention, widows. Not at weddings or banquets or in the market or other people's houses; where then? Luke tells us, writing that 'she did not leave the temple.'[179] Already she was past that age that Paul the Apostle did not exclude from the ministry of the church.[180] But what did she do there – did she dawdle or ramble on like an old woman? By no means; rather 'by fasts and prayers she served the Lord, by night and equally by day.'[181] This most holy woman knew to what the temple had been consecrated – not to telling tales that have nothing to do with religion or to wandering about aimlessly, but rather to praying according to that which Christ would teach later, after the counsel of the prophets: 'My house will be called a house of prayer.'[182] Prayer cannot be a sacrifice welcome to God unless it is accompanied by fasting and vigils. And for that reason it was also written: 'by day and by night.'[183] The priests sacrificed sheep, cattle, lambs, and calves; this woman presented for sacrifice a spiritual offering, the sweet incense of her vows, 'a sacrifice of praise'[184] – herself as a victim, rational and pure;[185] she made, you might say, a holocaust of her own heart that was burning with love of heavenly things. This woman of eighty-four fasted and kept constant vigil; should it not put certain widows to shame – young widows, at the peak of their physical strength – to sleep late into the day and not to abstain from meals even on those days on which the authority of the church mandates fasting? And if they ever do go to the temple – less out of any real inclination than because it is the thing to do – they sleep or prattle idly or waste the whole time in vapid thoughts. Anna also spoke in the temple; but what was it about which she spoke? About Jesus who would come. To whom did she speak? To anyone she pleased? By no means. Rather she spoke 'to all who awaited the redemption of Israel.'[186] The time had not yet come for Christ to be preached 'in season and out of season,'[187] nor would this have been appropriate for a woman – an old one at that.

Note moreover the reward of piety according to the promise of the gospel. Two people spoke about Jesus, Simeon the old man and Anna the old woman; and he of whom they spoke was found in their midst. It was this for which they were kept alive for such a long time: to see Christ, the anointed one of the Lord. But what happened to Anna, who saw the divine one as an infant, was a small thing compared to the good fortune of the widows of today; richer is the solace that they will find in Jesus if they turn their whole hearts to him, for they have the privilege of kissing Jesus daily in every aspect of his life as he was conceived, born, and proclaimed; as he taught and cried out; as he was crucified and rose and appeared to the disciples and ascended into the heavens, sitting at the right hand of the Father. He is lovable in every way, and wherever you touch him you will find him to be nothing but sheer delight if only you will take him to the centre of your heart.

Now someone may say: 'But Anna had the gift of prophecy, which today is granted to scarcely anyone.' But there is no need of it today. Nay, the gospel shines far more brilliantly for us today all over the world than did the spirit of prophecy for her. And anyone who understands the mystical significance in the Scriptures possesses the gift of prophecy – which is not to say that the Holy Spirit is spread about any less widely than it was in ancient times, if only we are worthy of it and circumstances demand it. If only we make room for the Holy Spirit in a worthy manner, it will not fail to appear to us. It loves minds that are chaste, pure, peaceful, and modest.

Come now, let us now move on to that poor humble widow, praised by the words of the Lord because with her small gift she surpassed the magnificent donations of all the wealthy; let us too admire with the Lord the piety of this humble woman, not so much as an object of praise as an example to imitate.[188] And look too how many things this brief little tale has to teach us. First, it commends kindness to the poor – not to just anyone, but to those through whom the temple of the Lord is built. For the temple of the Lord is the church. Whatever is brought for the sake of piety is sent to the treasury of the temple of the Lord – not simply what is given for building the physical temple, though even this is sometimes given in the proper spirit, but, what the temple in Jerusalem signified is much more pertinent. Paul to be sure praises kindness towards all, but particularly towards 'those who are of the household of faith.'[189] Among these there exist differences. The first fruits of kindness are owed to those who are joined to us by nature, such as children, grandchildren, and other relatives. And even here one should be more generous to those who have made a place in their lives for piety than to those who indulge the flesh. Something should be given to the wicked – but because they are human and so that they may live, not so that they may run riot. Nor do we run any risk if from time to time we should err in our judgment about who deserves our generosity; if the person who receives our kindness should dissipate his legacy, none the less the charity with which it was given remains intact, for whatever is given out of love of Christ is given to the temple.

What more does this widow have to teach us? That it is of no consequence how much you give but of very great consequence in what spirit you do so; mortals assess the worth of a gift by its price, God by the inclination of the giver. There is no excuse, widows, for pleading the poverty of your household; for this woman had nothing in the world besides two little coins, and all this she cast into the treasury. What, did she not fear that she would go hungry? For many people excuse themselves on this pretext nowadays, even wealthy people, saying: 'I will not give, lest there not be enough for me and my family.' And who is there so wealthy that he can never be found in narrow straits? According to this line of reasoning nobody will ever give anything to anyone. I know several such people for whom any old excuse suffices as grounds for not giving: 'I am building a house, I cannot be generous to the poor. My wife is pregnant. This year's crop was bad. I lost a whole shipment in a wreck at sea.' Some even seek to ground their avarice in prophecy: 'The astrologers say that scarcity is around the corner. I will not waste what I have saved.' If friends ask for anything, they say that one should not give to friends, as that sort of thing undermines the purity of a friendship. If they are relatives, they say that charity should not be given to members of one's own family. If something is sought in the name of indulgences, they say that they will not contribute to the self-indulgence of the Romans. If they are asked for something to repair the temple, they say they do not want to support the luxury of the priests. If they are asked to give to the monasteries, they say that no money is worse spent than money given to those lazy people whose stomachs are never satisfied. If public beggars approach them, they deny that those are the very paupers whom the divine Scripture commends to our care. Oh, no; they claim that those people are sordid and wicked and often even criminals.

By looking at things in this way, we learn never to give anything to anyone. How can anyone give as long as the slightest excuse serves to blunt the impulse to liberality? How much better would we spend our time inventing excuses for always giving! 'I will give more freely since he is related to me by blood; giving to him is a way of spending money on myself.' 'He is a good man, merely reduced to poverty' or 'He is a boy who gives promise of better things' or 'He was doubtless reduced to poverty on account of his goodness.' And, finally, 'I will give because he is a Christian, and in him I will revive my Lord.' If he is not even a Christian, then 'I will aid him in his hour of need none the less, if for no other reason than that he is a human being, and it may be that some day he will come to his senses.' Failing to help when one can is a form of murder. Nor does it show Christian clemency to kill a Turk for no other reason but that he is a Turk. The woman of Zarephath, reduced to a condition in which she was in danger of starving, did not shirk to share with Elijah what she had – something which she never would have done had she not trusted in the words of the prophet.[190] If we have faith, we will not excuse ourselves on the grounds of our poverty but rather will rush to alleviate the pressing need of someone close to us, trusting in the promises of God. And just what is it that he promised? An abundance of all things, and a beneficence that accrues great interest. It is likely that this widow of the gospel had with the labour of her own hands acquired what she contributed to the treasury, and it may be that she had forbidden herself to eat on that day so that she would not lack something to give to the poor. She was not anxious about the morrow, knowing the beneficence of God, which feeds even the tiny sparrows and clothes the lilies of the field and will not fail those who place their hopes in it.[191]

And for those who have nothing material to give, there is another form of charity no less pleasing to God, which is of great help to those who receive and in no way diminishes those who give. Tending to the aged and the sick, giving useful advice to young girls, offering consolation to those who are suffering, rousing the indolent from their sloth – the person who does these things is performing a service more valuable than if he were to distribute food or money. Blessed are those widows who behave in such a way as to excel in both these kinds of munificence. And yet no gift that is given in the proper spirit, that is to say, freely and eagerly, and with Christ in mind, can be so small or insignificant that it does not attain the greatest value in the eyes of God. There is no office, moreover, that is so humble that its beauty does not shine in the eyes of God if it is performed when it is needed and in the manner required. What can be humbler than treating the ulcerous sores of the poor, wiping vomit and pus from the mouth, warming with one's hand the stomach of a sick person? But no jewels, no roses, no perfumes shine more beautifully in God's eyes or smell sweeter in his nostrils.

That noble virgin Eustochium, born at Rome under gold-panelled ceilings, raised in luxury, considered these her greatest pleasures.[192] Why? Because in thinking about it she said to herself: 'Whatever of these things I do, I do not for mortals but for Christ; it is the members of Christ's body that I am treating. If he were present, suffering in this way, would it be right to turn away in distaste? But he has declared that whatever service is offered to his members is offered to him.'[193] The same piety marked Elizabeth, the landgrave of Hesse, who on account of her love for Christ classed as a delight things that are physically repugnant.[194] The person who thinks in this way with both her head and her heart will not be disgusted by any service that is owing to the poor. These humble acts by which the stains are purged from our souls are good. Nor can that good office go for naught to which Christ has attached himself as a guarantor. We are made particularly sluggish and hesitant in works of charity by the fact that we take little stock of the sort of people on whom we bestow these works. We calculate the worth of various individuals and compute what return will come to us from them. In fact, however, mere mortals should not be the issue in our minds; whatever is expended is spent on God, and we should give thought to his deserts, to what rewards He will give back to us.

From this woman there is also a third lesson to be learned, O widows. The piety of this poor woman brought her more shame than praise, for only the rich were admired for their contributions; but in fact all people had as their observer Jesus, and she alone deserved the plaudits of him who alone saw into people's hearts.[195] Do not be discouraged, widows, if nobody among mortals recognizes your beneficence, if nobody gives you his approval; even if many people scoff at you, be content in this one admirer, for it is enough if he sees and approves. You will have done for him whatever benefits you confer on the poor for love of him alone, and no deposit is more secure than that which is hidden away in the bosom of a poor person, even if the individual who is aided by some good work of yours does not know whence it comes. The less you hope for recognition from people, the richer the reward that will come to you from God.

And if we approach this text a little more closely through the inner meaning of its tropological sense, this widow teaches us plainly this very thing: two things conduce to every good work, our human free will and the grace of God. What we contribute in this regard, moreove, is so minuscule that it is barely anything at all and in fact without assistance from elsewhere would be of no use whatever, and frequently indeed gets in the way: free will, furthermore, includes within it two elements, reason and will. These are the two copper coins that make a penny – a source of extreme poverty if we keep them for ourselves but which may bring forth huge spiritual riches if we lend out on interest to the Lord all that we have. He will join his great resources with our tiny ones. He will illuminate our darkened intellect by the light of our faith in him, he will mobilize our will with the ardour of his love, and a wondrous treasure will be forged that his generosity will impute wholly to us.

Let us stand alongside that poor humble widow and throw everything that we possess – if indeed anything is entirely ours – into his treasury. The humbler the gift is on our part, the more it will be amplified by the munificence of the supreme power. What is of the least account in our estimation will become of the greatest in that of God. The rich contributed many things, but Christ did not recognize the value of their gifts; rather he recognized the worth of the widow's gift, for the more cheaply a gift is held by mortals, the more highly it is cherished by God. This indeed is an index of good deeds, that no human being should claim credit for it. Modesty is what commends our good deeds to God. Although we have done everything, let us say: 'We are useless servants; we did what it was our obligation to do.'[196] If we say this from the bottom of our hearts, if we disparage whatever might seem to be ours and view it as nothing at all, the Lord, who is a generous assessor, will accept it as a great gift.

This precept holds true not only in material gifts, in which even the impious sometimes excel, but also in spiritual gifts, which often are diminished or even destroyed by arrogance. There are some who build temples with shining marble. There are some who build monasteries at magnificent expense: inside and out on each column or window are sculpted or painted the insignia of the rich man at whose expense the building was erected. A college is named after him; he himself lies huge on a monument portraying him as he usually was when he went out to war. Who would not admire such unrestrained generosity? But I am afraid that Christ may not esteem this sort of gift very highly if it has been bestowed not for the sake of piety but so that the donor might in this way commend his name to posterity. Even in the most abundant munificence, however, one may be 'a poor widow' provided that one's gift derives its value not from its monetary worth but from the spirit in which it is given. If some especially wealthy person contributes a huge amount of money for the support of the poor, thinking to himself: 'I am contributing nothing of my own; even that which I keep for myself belongs to the poor; I deserve no thanks. I do well if I avoid vengeance of the Lord, and would that it were possible to bestow even this in such a way that its value comes to the members of Christ's body; I seek no thanks from mortal men'; this indeed is a poor widow, a person who barely contributes two tiny coins – tiny, but pleasing to the Lord. I would love to linger longer in the contemplation of this poor blessed woman – for who would not want this solemn procession to advance as slowly as possible? But this book must be completed.

As we take our leave of this woman, we then encounter the widow carrying out her only son to be buried.[197] She must have been wealthy, since such a retinue adorned the funeral (it is written in Luke: 'She was a widow, and there was a great crowd of citizens with her'[198]); such solemnity was infrequent in the funerals of the poor. She bewailed, moreover, her young son, the only one she had. Pay attention, widows, in case this widow has something valuable to teach you. There is no novelty in a widowed woman shedding tears over her only son who has lost his life; for even strangers bewail a premature death. If you look just to the historical sense, it happened only once that Jesus restored this young man to life. But the allegory conceals within it a fruitful lesson. How many mothers are there who mourn hysterically the corporeal death of their sons? But this kind of death, as we have said, is not greatly to be mourned, since it is common to all – and is indeed even a good for many. But there are very few mothers who mourn the son whose soul has died but who still carries around a body ripe for decay. Or would you not agree that a youth has died wretchedly who wastes away in shameful amours, who is smeared with perfumes, who spends the whole night in dice and other foolish games of chance, in drinking parties – who is checked neither by the fear of God nor by the respect for other mortals that might restrain him from doing whatever strikes his fancy? He who has cast away the fear of God is a dead man; he who has no regard either for what people might say is on the way to the grave; and he who is carried along by his illicit desires as if by pallbearers outside the boundary of 'the city' is being carried out for burial. The city is the church, and outside it stand the heathens, the Jews, the schismatics, and the incurable heretics; they are buried, decried by all, with their impiety already deplored. For nobody continues to cry out in abuse against those buried in their graves. But after his youthful inclinations cast him headlong into every manner of vices and wipe away all modesty, what is left, except that he should either abandon his profession of the Christian faith or fall into heresy, thus becoming complacent in his evil ways?

And what can you be thinking, O widow, who fail so utterly to bewail a youth who has died in this way so that you take pleasure in such a sophisticated son and readily supply him with money to spend on his wickedness? Do you not realize that you are dying along with him? God will hold you, who in your indulgence corrupted a youth by bringing him up in this way, accountable for his soul. If you are a widow and have such a son, imitate the widow of the gospel, bewail your dead son, and hope that the Lord Jesus, who will be moved by your tears, will come to your aid and will restore your dead son to you alive once more. For he alone can call back those who have experienced shame even from the grave.

In such a way did Paul the Apostle with the greatest of labouring pains struggle constantly for the Galatians, until Christ was formed in them.[199] Thus the widow Monica by her tears gained for Christ her son Augustine. But how many mothers there are who have sons much farther gone into a life of perdition than he; but they spend not a single tear on these unfortunate children even though they were the cause of their deaths.[200] Weep, mothers; weep widows, who have young sons lost in self-indulgence, infected by impious schools of thought, on the very precipice of the greatest danger. Let them not be buried in despair outside the city of Nain, in which alone is there consolation for sinners; weep, until the Lord, who does not wish sinners to die, comes to you and orders the bier to be halted, lifts up those who are lying there prostrate, and restores them alive and well to mother church. Give new birth again to those whom once you bore.

Let us move on now; bear with me and let us proceed to the widow from the parable, and let us learn from her how to be importunate in prayer. She prevailed against an impious judge 'who neither feared God nor revered men.'[201] How much more will we influence the Lord, whose nature it is to be kindly! He sometimes delays answering our prayers so that our sense of need might be stronger. Let us not cease to implore him, let us not cease to cry out to him loudly, until he takes pity on us and delivers us from our adversary. We all have as our adversary Satan, who never sleeps and lays as many snares for us as there are pleasures of the flesh. No defenses against him are so reliable as crying out to the Lord without ceasing – but only if this comes from the heart more than from the lips. Let us cry out with trust not in our own merits but in the divine goodness, and in the conviction that even if for a time we seem to implore deaf ears, none the less we will be granted what we ask – or something yet more suitable for us.

From here let us move on to those holy widows who ministered to the apostles as they disseminated the gospel through the various parts of the world, and from their example let us learn the art of kindness, in particular towards those who labour sincerely in the practice of piety, and who teach the gospel both in their speech and in their lives. Let us contemplate the widows who stood around Peter weeping and showing the clothes which Dorcas had made for them.[202] So great was the authority of these widows that Peter on account of their tears restored the poor woman to life and returned her to her earlier ministry.

There is no need for a widow to travel through different parts of the country today. Every place affords an occasion for promoting the gospel. In the fields, in the cities, in the churches, a crowd is often present; and yet as a rule nobody speaks. Oh, yes, songs are sung, psalms even; but what a rare individual it is who purely and sincerely ministers to a Christian assembly with the nourishment of the evangelical word. Let the piety and generosity of widows be alert to this need. Margaret, the great-grandmother of Henry VIII, who now sits on the English throne, contributed whatever wealth she had amassed so that learned and virtuous men might be trained in preaching the gospel to the people.[203] In these times, too, 'the harvest to be reaped is great, but the labourers are too few.'[204] When I myself was in Italy, I was of the opinion that the only thing missing to ensure the happiness of that land was people to preach the evangelical doctrine.[205] The people are sufficiently tractable, but there is an unbelievable lack of preaching. From this arises their great poverty of soul, hardening of the heart, and sluggishness of faith. You widows were on hand to give aid as the gospel was first brought forth; fill the role which you undertook long ago, assist with all your resources and devotion in the labours of those who struggle zealously in tilling the field of the Lord. It is the task of widows not only to come to the aid of holy men but even to give them birth. It is to a widow that we owe that Timothy who was so dear to Paul the Apostle, who according to Paul's testimony was brought up from his boyhood learned in the Scriptures because his most excellent mother considered this to be important.[206] And this Timothy, though only a youth, Paul esteemed so highly that he called him *γνήσιον τέκνον*, 'my true child in the faith,'[207] that is to say, true, genuine, altogether authentic son. And writing to the people of Philippi, he calls him *ἰσόψυχον*, that is to say, soul mate, a title he denied to anyone else.[208] So tenderly did he love that son of a widow that when he was in ill health he wrote advising him to forbear his vow always to drink water and take instead a little wine.[209] And so that you may recognize that some of the praise for Timothy's virtues was to be given to his mother and grandmother, notice that Paul wrote to him: 'I am reminded of your sincere faith, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you.'[210] Do you see how the Apostle drew confidence for his good opinion of Timothy from the upbringing he had received from widows – as if it could not happen that one who as a boy found pious women to educate him should grow into an impious man, but rather of necessity should succeed as an heir to the religion of his parents and grandparents, which he had drunk in with the milk of the woman who bore him? Paul pointed to this same thing when he wrote to him saying, 'If you put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of faith, and of the good doctrine that you have followed.'[211] Do you hear what this boy imbibed from his parents? From the bosom of a widow he came to the company of so great an Apostle. And none the less he was born to a Greek father, whose death benefited Timothy in that the entire responsibility for his upbringing devolved on his grandmother and mother.[212]

On the same grounds the widowed mother of the apostle John is also praised, since she had sons who walked in the way of truth and charity; on the same grounds the apostle singled her out for praise by name.[213] You have the means, widows, to console yourselves for your condition; you have a lovely model according to which you may organize your efforts. Do not lament that you are destitute whose care, tutelage, and guardianship he whom nobody can resist has taken to himself: do not fear the violence of men, for you have God as your protector and avenger. Do not beg solace from this world, for if you turn yourselves squarely towards God you will find the font of all true satisfaction. In the eyes of the world you are widows, but in fact you enjoy the delights of your bridegroom, Christ. You will not find your widowhood distasteful if you consider what outstanding models you have, and how great is the worth that the Lord has placed upon you. Nothing remains but for you to respond with the piety of your lives to God's kindness towards you and to the examples of your role models. Everyone reaches out to embrace solace and status; few are mindful of their duty. The glory of the apostles was of the highest order. Those who have succeeded in their place receive with eager ears any mention of their authority and high esteem. But many of them are offended if one reminds them of their duty.

In the same way princes prick up their ears if anyone cites Scripture as an authority for their eminence and station – as, for example, where it says that 'all authority is from God, and who struggles against it, struggles against God';[214] but the minute someone starts to point out how much integrity, vigilance, and solicitude are required from those who exercise a great deal of authority, you will not find so many who will give a fair hearing to what they have to say. But it has been established that the highest honour carries with it the greatest obligation, which if it is not met will turn the honour to shame. If prelates glory in the authority and exalted role of the apostles, although their entire way of life differs from theirs, do they not confer upon themselves more shame than glory? Similarly, if a prince glories in the fact that he is the vicar of God on earth, from whom he indeed received power over so many thousands of people, should he not at the same time bear in mind that he who endowed him with this power did it so that he should regulate society as far as possible according to the divine pattern? God, moreover, governs the universe with the highest justice and the highest clemency, and in his administration looks not to his own advantage but to the well-being of mortals and injures no one despite his supreme capacity to do so. For whoever is injured is injured by his own fault. Now whether what we say is agreeable, let each one judge for himself. If a king delegates to someone the administration of a province, having laid down for him the principles by which he wishes him to govern it, and this deputy scorns the instructions of his lord and does everything in the opposite way and according to his own desire, what kind of favour is he likely to find from his prince? With what propriety does he deserve the title of governor? You have before your eyes the priests and bishops of your state of life, dear widows; from their deeds it is clear the kind of life widows should lead.

None of what I have said is derived from secular sources; I have extracted it all from divine writings. The promised consolation will not fail you, nor is there any danger that you will fall into error if you set forth from here on the road that I have pointed out so clearly to you. And so I will make a fitting end to this volume if we consider together briefly what the blessed Paul wrote about the condition of widows. For we are shaping the Christian widow, and he speaks of Christian widows, although times have changed so that not everything applies in exactly the same way today.

In the gospel, women are praised who had followed the Lord from Galilee, ministering to him from their own resources.[215] They are praised who, after the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven, offered the same ministrations to the apostles that they had offered to Christ.[216] Nowadays it would be considered unladylike for widows to follow preachers of the word up hill and down dale, since there are people all over to provide for the needs of teachers quite sufficiently, and they have thus been provided for by other means. That ancient purity and strength of the spirit, moreover, has waned, so that it is not safe for preachers to lead women around with them, since there will be suspicion of sin even where it is unwarranted. Add too the fact that in ancient times those who believed in the word of God were in general few, and poor, and humble in the sight of men, but the hatred of the name of God's word was enormous, nor did it seem fitting for those who had given their allegiance to Christ to seek alms from those who hated the name of Christ; those therefore who were in charge of the church took to themselves the care of widows and children. To this purpose those of somewhat loftier station contributed – some giving all they had, others a portion that was in accordance with their means, thus tempering their generosity in such a way that on the one hand others should not lack what necessity dictated but on the other they themselves would not be forced to become burdens to the church.

Hence it is that Paul wrote to Timothy, 'I wish moreover for younger widows to marry, and bear children, and become matrons, and give no occasion for an enemy to speak ill of them. For some have already strayed after Satan.'[217] And a little earlier he had said, 'Strictly avoid, moreover, younger widows.'[218] The Apostle might appear to some to have meant that it is not fitting for a bishop to converse with younger widows and that such women should not be allowed to remain perpetually celibate once they have lost their husbands. Nor was there any lack of people who allowed only a single marriage even to men; some took away from Christianity the right to marry altogether. Since the teachings of these people have been condemned by the church, however, let us not suspect St Paul of teaching such things, especially since he would in that case be convicted of contradicting himself. For when in writing to the Corinthians he exhorts virgins to perpetual chastity, he does not require it of them, since he invites those attached to each other to that very matrimony, provided that their vow be made at the right time, with their full consent.[219] When he was certainly writing to widows, he made his mind sufficiently clear: 'To the unmarried and widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do.'[220]

He does not, then, deter younger widows from resolutions of chastity, but he was apprehensive lest the church be weighed down and debilitated by the ministry of such women.[221] He is concerned here with widows who are taken into the ministry of the church and nourished by its resources because either the poverty of their station or the cruelty of their blood relations or their relatives by marriage has deprived them of the means to live. If younger widows were admitted to this ministry, a double danger would hang over the church – first, that its slender resources would not suffice for the nurture of all, and second, that the tender age of these women, which is rather inclined to self-indulgence, might in the case of their lapsing into sin bring shame upon the church; and even in the absence of such a lapse, their very youth might none the less offer to the pagans and ill-disposed Jews cause for detraction. There was also the danger, moreover, that certain widows would be drawn to the ministry of the church less by piety than by the prospect of food and other kinds of support. Consequently he prescribed 'that no widow under sixty years should be admitted,' on the grounds that this age is less dangerous and less subject to suspicion.[222]

Nor did the Apostle find age a sufficient recommendation. Rather he demanded the testimony of a widow's whole life: 'that she should have been the wife of one man,' for though remarriage is allowed to those who do not dedicate themselves to chastity, still it carries with it the appearance of incontinence; 'that she should have a reputation for good works; that she should have raised her children for a life of piety and chastity; that she should have demonstrated Christian hospitality; that she should have washed the feet of the saints; and that she should have ministered to the afflicted' – in the name of Christ, and even at her own peril; and finally 'that she should have been assiduous in good works of all kinds.'[223] For it is only fair that she who has aided the church with her own resources, while she had them, should in turn when she is helpless be relieved by the resources of the church, and that she should find shelter from that source to which she had given it when it was hers to give; and she has offered solid promise of perpetual chastity who has been married only once and has placed the education of her children above the self-indulgent pleasure of a new marriage. It is altogether probable that she who does not desire another husband once she has had children married in the first place out of desire for children, not for pleasure. Nor does any suspicion of arrogance fall upon the woman who did not find it burdensome to wash the feet of the saints; and it is not likely that she would depart from the Christian faith whose piety the savagery of tyrants could not have dissuaded from giving aid to other Christians, or that she would simulate charity who never failed in her duty, for hypocrisy cannot be sustained so unfailingly. Finally, it must surely be the case that a woman about whose integrity all testimony agrees is indeed virtuous. Indeed, all widows should meet these criteria. Age, of course, which nobody can increase or diminish in herself, is an exception; but all these other qualifications are specifically and expressly demanded from the widow who is to be admitted into the tutelage and ministry of the church.

But what is meant by the words: 'Strictly avoid younger widows'?[224] Clearly that younger widows should not be received into the class of those who are to be supported by the resources of the church. Not even those who are needy, and are recommended by all the aforementioned virtues? No. Why? Because there is a way of life that is more fitting for them. Their youth and beauty will easily find for them husbands at whose expense they may live and for whom they may bring forth children. In raising these up they will offer a great service unto God, nor in the mean time will a strain be placed on the resources of the church, nor will the reputation either of the woman or of the church be in danger. And it was not rashly that Paul arrived at this caution; rather experience taught him what a great danger was involved here. 'For when younger women,' received into the charity of the church, 'begin to lust against Christ,' whom they had chosen as a spouse for themselves, and end up by 'wanting to marry' with great injury to this spouse, and to the shame of the church, and 'with the damnation' of their souls, 'since they have abandoned their original resolution,' this itself is no slight danger;[225] but to this is added another, namely, that freed from the jurisdiction of husbands, and corrupted by leisure, they will make a habit of going about to other people's homes, not only doing these people no good but indeed even making nuisances of themselves with their chatter and their prying, saying things that would disturb the peace of good Christian people.[226] For those who suffer from the vice of curiosity suffer from garrulousness, and nobody who comes running to you to inform you of the doings of others will be silent among others where you own doings are concerned.

For all these evils marriage is the remedy. The authority of a husband will bring the natural levity occasioned by his wife's youth and sex under control; then too the responsibilities of a family give little space to idleness. And just as all widows should excel according to their means in all those things that Paul requires in a virtuous widow, so all widows must shun those things that he lists as base. The church must not, however, receive all women simply because they are of mature age and virtuous, but only those who have neither the hope of finding a husband, because of their age, nor a relative who might support them. To this he added: 'If any Christian man or woman has widows in the family, he or she must attend to their needs so that the church shall not be burdened, and in this case it shall suffice that they be true widows.'[227] The Apostle, then, neither prescribed monogamy to an older woman nor discouraged continence in very young widows, provided that their resolution be spontaneous and that their households have sufficient resources to sustain them. He makes quite clear, moreover, that the natural dangers inherent in tender age and beauty stand in the way of their easily being received into vows of chastity. For though the virtue of continence is illustrious, still it is far safer, albeit less glorious, to marry.[228] Accordingly, even in marriage he advocates an interruption of normal marital relations so that the partners may have leisure for prayer – but only by mutual consent and with the good faith that each partner owes the other; and after a time they should return to regular relations, lest the natural incontinence of the flesh lead Satan to tempt them.[229] In sum, though it may be more glorious to profess perpetual chastity, this chastity is distinctly more secure if it is offered with free will and if nothing in the mean time is omitted that pertains to the protection of one's virtue.

Now someone may ask at this juncture, what age is suitable for a vow of chastity? I am not unaware that the ancient authorities declared that any age which is fit for marriage vows is also fit for this sort of vow. Nowadays indeed people often do not even wait for puberty. But if age and the examples of many who fell away from their holy vows deterred Paul from accepting younger widows, how much more cautious must we be today, when unhappy examples abound, both of women who departed from their vows and of women who did not – for some keep these vows in such a way that it would have been far better for them not to have.[230] Perhaps it would be the best and safest thing for mere mortals to abstain entirely from vows binding in perpetuity that are merely human inventions: nobody should be compelled to take any vow.

Along the same lines, it is unwise to tie an indissoluble knot before the thirtieth year – particularly for those of the female sex, which is by nature more unstable unless it is anchored by a grace that is singular and granted to very few. None the less, all Christians should see to it that from their very first years both boys and girls should be brought up with an eye to chastity, modesty, and piety. In this way virtue will come naturally and snares be cast for none. I confine myself here to addressing those men and women who have thus far preserved their liberty. Those who are already bound I think should do nothing rashly or against the authority of their elders. This will ensure both a reputation that is more secure and a conscience that is more at rest. At the same time, care must be taken lest anyone seek out such liberty in order to indulge the flesh.

It is moreover the obligation of a widow while she is celibate to live as if she had taken a vow of perpetual chastity. It is emphatically the case that absolutely nobody is compelled to take such a vow – and that no one should be received into such a vow rashly. Let a widow be allowed to make use of the free will that the Lord has granted unto her; let the rewards of celibacy be pointed out – but by the same token let the burden and the danger be pointed out as well. Just as St Paul quite openly proclaimed a widow's freedom to marry again, provided it be in the Lord, at the same time, however, he pointed out the disadvantages that accompany this liberty, for he said: 'Those who marry will have affliction in their flesh.'[231]

Now as a general rule serial polygamy has a bad reputation, exposed as it has been to the scathing and scurrilous remarks of humankind; but it is no crime in the sight of God. There are three considerations, therefore, which argue against a new marriage for widows by whom children have been brought up: reputation, age, and piety. All good omens favour the weddings of virgins, but not so those of widows. Now rumour and the gossipy chatter of the rabble should not be so important to a woman that she prefers to burn than to marry.[232] Disapproving gossip, however, tends to pursue a woman who is rather more advanced in years (particularly if she has arrived at that point at which there is no longer any hope of progeny.) The auspices are hardly good that attend on a marriage prompted by incontinence, a practice not without blame, though it may be no crime. (The church, it should be noticed, does not even in these cases forbid the remedy of marriage, taking the view that it is motivated here not by lust but by the desire for companionship in old age.)

For the rest, there are two kinds of piety – towards God and towards one's children, whence it extends to any neighbour whatsoever. The first sort of piety consists in faith and charity. It is practised and nurtured by prayer, thanksgiving, and meditation upon heavenly things. These activities call for sobriety, fasts, purity of life, vigilance, and the study of the philosophy of the gospel. That philosophy is acquired through listening frequently to sermons and by conversing with people outstanding for both piety and learning. If from time to time there should be a dearth of these (which would be natural, since such people are so rare that they are often in short supply), the mind should be fed on reading of the Scriptures. In these it is appropriate for a widow to verse herself with a pious curiosity accompanied by the reverence due to divine revelation, seeing to it that you contemn nothing and that you make sure to accommodate your inclinations to the law of Scripture rather than interpreting Scripture according to your inclination. Do not indulge in any audacious pronouncements on the meaning of the text, and abstain from questing vaingloriously after useless points of detail. Those things are most particularly to be learnt that excite in us faith and charity; that correct our lives; and that inspire, nurture, and bring to very perfection the desire for life in heaven.

Now although all portions of Scripture contribute to these ends, still some parts are more suited to some readers than to others. Some parts, for example, are helpful for princes, or priests, or married people, and are not particularly appropriate for widows. There are also some cruxes that are more safely left to those who are learned and trained in scholarly methods. Nor will it be without profit to pore over the works of devout men, plucking wherever one can whatever snatch of wisdom conduces to progress in piety. Among these one must make careful choices both of authors and of subject-matter. For some were meant to be read by few, such as Hilary; some have tempered their style to the level of fairly simple people, such as Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine; some, like Thomas and Scotus, simply teach and do not affect people's emotions, whereas some do both, such as John Chrysostom and Basil. One must beware only of those who by wicked teachings vitiate the sincerity of one's faith, for certain things are better left unknown than studied at peril. But just how one should pray, I myself have shown in another work,[233] and before me, indeed, celebrated Doctors of the church wrote very fully on this topic; there is no need, therefore, to go into this again here.

Nor should any heed be paid to those who think women should be excluded from the very source of solace and advantage for Christians, unless we give the name of madwomen to Principia, Marcella, Paula, Proba, Juliana, Demetrias, Sunnia, Fretela, and other women noble in their piety – and maintain that they were joined in their insanity by the most admired Doctors of the church, who in the volumes that bear their names both praised and encouraged the study of sacred Scripture by women.[234] The only thing you need guard against is the danger of being overwhelmed by that apostolic reproach: 'always learning, and never arriving at the genuine knowledge of the truth.'[235] Here it will behove the widow to graft the prudence of the serpent onto the simplicity of the dove,[236] so that she may be discerning in choosing those to whom she pays heed and in accordance with whose counsels she organizes her life. For it is the singular mark of the female sex to rejoice in accepting the authority of some male.

There have been, moreover, many people in ancient times, and large numbers today, who in accordance with the words of Christ 'devour the homes of widows, under cover of long prayers,' and who in keeping with the teaching of St Paul 'enter the homes of women weighed down with sins, who allow themselves to be led according to various desires, and lead them captive';[237] and those whom the grandeur of their station allows to advance those whom they favour to positions of respect and honour are in particularly great danger in this regard. To whom indeed would not such rich booty teach hypocrisy and fawning? Take care lest you be deceived by the false image of piety. This can be prevented if you first use perfect judgment in choosing what to read and then keep your mind's eye clearly focused so that you will not be tricked by illusory holiness. For Satan is a versatile craftsman, from time to time 'transforming himself into the angel of light,' nor is he anywhere more noxious than when he deceives the unwary in the guise of religion.[238]

It is necessary therefore to apply to the choice of teachers a mind that is pure and sincere, in order to avoid what the same Apostle wrote – that when we have ears that itch after evil we take to ourselves teachers who delight rather than instruct.[239] For the things that give health are often bitter. In making these choices, accordingly, do not look to a sorrowful expression, a wildness of the eyebrows, or cloaks or phylacteries and the other illusions with which the Pharisees are accustomed to lay snares for widows whom they wish to devour; rather, look within, before you commit yourself to someone. For sometimes those who are in reality greedy wolves come clothed in the skins of sheep[240] – people whom Paul described along the same lines when he said 'having the appearance of piety but denying the actual truth.'[241] Once such people have been received into your home, moreover, they insinuate themselves into its inner recesses, nor is anything so hidden that they do not sniff it out, so that they still pose a threat even if one manages by chance or luck to detect their deceit. Thus it happens that, having accepted them before they proved themselves, you cannot shut them out once they have proved wanting.

Let a widow banish this sort of person far from her home if she wishes her own modesty and that of her sons and her daughters and her maids to be secure and if she does not wish her resources to be eaten away. It is by far the safest thing to admit none of these people at all as a regular visitor to your home, for even if you find one of them who is pure of mind, none the less you have someone who can be corrupted by familiarity. And to see to it that this does not happen, he will not come alone, but rather will come accompanied now by one person, now by another. Who can guarantee the integrity of another? As Paul says, moreover: 'What is done by these in secret it is shameful even to recount.'[242] Nor will it be difficult to detect the true colours of such people, if only you put your mind to it. When the opportunity has arisen for them to drink rather more deeply than they should, that which has been lurking in their breasts comes out into the light. But if they should be victorious and so successful that their hostess welcomes them even though she has fully recognized how nefarious they are, then a woman has admitted into her home not a spiritual mentor but a tyrant.

I do not mean by this to suggest that we should think ill of everyone whose garb suggests holiness. Piety can of course lie concealed beneath clothing of any sort. I only wish you to take care lest you are ensnared by such deceit and, when you believe you have taken a lamb into your home, discover that you have in fact gotten a wolf, or a fox, or an ape, or a boar, or some other such beast. And it is not sufficient for the home of a widow simply to lack all sin: it must lack the slightest suspicion of sin as well. Even to repeat the sorts of things that are said in some cases would be embarrassing. It is particularly important, moreover, for every widow to see to it that she does not confer as a solitary woman with a solitary man, without some sober matron as a witness. Nor is it proper to abuse the privacy of constant confession with endless recourse for purposes different from those for which it was established. We are walking a path laced with snares, and scarcely any precautions are sufficient. Safer, therefore, familiarity with books. For the things they have to say are holier; when you want them, there they are; and they relieve the tedium of solitude with a pleasure that is most salutary. Now leisure and solitude are teachers of many bad things, particularly to women; and so it is fortunate that the Christian widow need give no place to leisure and need never be alone. For how can it be that someone who is given to such holy, sublime and pure studies should be able to endure wandering to and fro to other people's houses or to waste away the day with silly talk? For Mary, whose leisure Martha envied, knew no real leisure; rather she was occupied differently, when she sat at the feet of the Lord.[243]

Coming now to the other side of piety, indeed there will be no leisure if we give due and frequent attention to Martha's complaint against Mary. Nor does anything prevent both sisters from being combined in one woman, and this reproach is most welcome to Christ. God indeed is to be loved alone, and for himself, and above all, whereas mortals are to be loved because of him, or in him. Because of him we love even our enemies, and in him we love them. Now among all these relationships, that of parents and children holds pride of place. What leisure, therefore, can there be for a widow who has sons and daughters at home and a household that is dependent upon her care? What can be a more consuming labour than forming the character and temperament of children in the first stages of life? The widow who leaves her young children at home and is constantly dining out, constantly runs here and there to weddings, to performances of one kind and other, to dances, and is constantly moving from one place to the next – this sort of woman is no mother to her children but rather a stepmother. On the other hand, the widow who under the pretext of religion neglects the care of her children and devotes herself instead to those who pass themselves off in apostolic roles, defrauding her own heirs while supporting the luxury of others with her own resources, stands far away from true piety. They boast that they are giving to God what in fact is spent on themselves. Admittedly, whatever is given for the love of God is spent on God; but in the sacred writings those are scolded who do well to give but give to an unworthy cause.[244] It is not uncommon that what they give is given to the indolent, or to those who are strong and capable of earning sustenance with their hands – were leisure not sweeter than labour: what is being given is going to those who already live in abundance and who will use what more they get as grounds for spending still more. To see to it that nothing of the kind happens, therefore, the first demand of piety is care for one's children; for God is in them, and what is spent on them for love of God, God will allow to be added to his account.

If by chance anyone is inclined to become angry with me for daring to teach these things, let him hear Paul speaking even more strictly and be angry with him sooner than with me; for this he wrote to his beloved Timothy: 'If any widow has children or grandchildren, let her learn first to govern her own household, and to render the aid that is owing to parents. For this is pleasing in the sight of God.'[245] Do you hear the Apostle? 'Let her learn first,' he says, and adds: 'for this is pleasing in the sight of God.' When he says 'first,' he is indicating the order in which things are ranked. When he adds 'in the sight of God,' he bids the decrees of mortals to give way before divine commands.[246] And where are those Pharisees who teach that a son should answer back to a destitute father or mother: 'The gift you would have from me is given to God'?[247] To these very authorities should be said: 'What is owing to one's parents to support them is deposited in the treasury of the temple, and the precept of God is violated because of a merely human tradition.' And is this not the very thing that the Apostle indicated when he added: 'For this is pleasing in the sight of God'?[248] At all times and in all places it is agreeable to God to come to the aid of one's parents and one's children, for nature dictates this and God has taken care to prescribe it.

To give to the temple is considered unpleasing to God! What? Can it be then unwelcome to God to cast a coin into the treasury? No, but the Lord himself, who passes judgment, declares that it is unacceptable to increase the wealth of the temple at the cost of defrauding one's parents, children, and grandchildren. It was once not difficult to finance the construction of the only temple that existed in Jerusalem – although that money that was in good part contributed for the support of paupers, the priests (though it had been given for the sake of relieving the destitute) spent on their own indulgence: nowadays in individual towns and villages, how very many temples there are, how many treasuries, from which nothing is returned to the poor but nearly everything is turned aside instead to the arrogant luxury and licence of those who have succeeded to the place of the Pharisees. Would that they had not succeeded also to their vices! But the Apostle was not referring to the Pharisees but to the apostles, ministers of the word of the gospel.

Who would deny that it would be a pious act for a widow to come to the aid of the poor? But what does Paul teach us? 'If any widow does not look out for members of her own family, particularly the members of her own household, she has denied her faith and is worse than an infidel.'[249] What harsher thing could be said? 'She has denied her faith,' he says, and, not content with this grave reproach, adds 'and she is worse than an infidel.' But today those who deny the Christian faith are consigned to the flames. What therefore will become of such a widow? Unless she repents, she will be assigned to the eternal flames. Her words profess faith, but her deeds deny it. For when the gospel does not breach the law of nature but rather confirms it, does she not deny a singularly holy law who turns a deaf ear to the law of nature? 'And she is worse that an infidel.' For what reason? Because when the pagans, obeying their natural inclination, took care for both parents and children, is she not worse than the pagans whom neither that natural instinct that impels even brute beasts to care for their young nor the precept of the gospel moves to look out for those who are closely related by blood? Paul in the letter to the Romans commemorates among the other dreadful crimes of some pagans on account of which 'God gave them up to a base mind'[250] that they were devoid of natural affection towards their relations, calling them 'heartless.'[251] When, moreover, will she come to the aid of strangers who neglects her own flesh and blood? Since these things are so, how do they dare try to persuade women 'what you give to us, you give to God; what you spend on your children, is given to mere flesh and blood'? Woe unto you who teach people to violate the precept of God in order that you may look out for your own bellies – dare I say your own debauchery?

Now if a widow who neglects her children and dissipates her resources in the guise of religious zeal is condemned by Paul, what place shall we assign to those who squander their resources basely on their own pleasures – in some cases even reducing their neglected children to poverty by giving what is owing to them to their adulterous lovers instead? But that solicitousness that widows owe to their children and other relations extends not only to physical nurture but, much more important, to their entire upbringing. To be sure, the care of the body is a necessity; but it is far crueler to let one's children grow up devoid of all natural feeling for religion than it is to allow them to perish of hunger. If there are no children, their place can be filled by nephews and nieces and then all the other gradations of physical and spiritual relationships. In the third place, all who are members of Christ are our brothers and sisters. Paula,[252] that most illustrious Christian, did not retire to Bethlehem until she had brought her children up to that age and that station of life that does not demand parental care. Having first satisfied nature, she set aside what was left for relieving the needs of the poor, and though she had few children of her own, she gathered together a huge number of daughters in the spirit, for whose physical needs she provided and whom she instructed in the teaching of the Lord, so that she was in all ways the mother of all. Nor indeed did she support them in idleness, for this is not to support but rather to corrupt. And this example it behoves all widows to imitate in such a way that they do not support either their female relations or any poor people whatsoever in idleness, provided they have the capacity to work; but they should see to it that each should work with her hands, and they should not only minister to their want with money but also add to this the admonition and exhortation to live devoutly; for often this class of people is in greater need of spiritual than of bodily aid.

Do you see now the high level of activity that is demanded of a Christian widow? Such a widow the Lord will doubtless 'bless with a singular blessing, and will satisfy her poor with bread.'[253] The widow therefore who deserves the highest praise is the one who refrains from remarrying for this reason: so that she may be utterly unencumbered in the eager practice of piety and may enjoy Christ her heavenly Spouse without distraction. I do not deny that this is indeed an arduous task, but a large part of this enterprise lies in good will – which is a gift of the Lord, to be sure, but certainly given to those who seek it, to those who live in modesty and prayer. For the common crowd remembers all too well the saying of Paul: 'It is better to marry than to burn.'[254] But many of those who burn do so of their own free will, do so because they themselves supply the very tinder and kindling for the fire. For the rest, though the spontaneous love of perpetual chastity is best, still it is safer to feel one's way towards this commitment cautiously and not to bind oneself completely in one sweeping vow. It is a good idea to reserve judgment on first impulses; the strength of an individual's resolve must be explored over a long period of time and in a variety of ways. This is the first aspect of piety, about which I spoke.

The widow next deserving of praise is she whom concern for her children dissuades from a second marriage. For it is proper that a widow should appropriate to herself the care her husband would have bestowed on their children and in their upbringing be both father and mother. But the woman who introduces a stepfather into her children's lives can barely be half the mother she once was to the children she had by her previous husband; for she is no longer her own mistress, and besides, she may be afraid of offending her new husband if she favours her children by her first marriage. For just as it is rare for a stepmother not to hate her husband's children, similarly it is not common for stepfathers to love their stepchildren from the bottom of their hearts. And so it happens that those who before were orphaned of one parent are now orphaned of both, having received in place of a mother, a stepmother, and in place of a father, an enemy. Even if none of these things should happen, moreover, still it is against human nature for love that is pulled in many directions to remain as strong as before, just as the force of a river is lessened if it is diverted into several different streams. The woman who has resolved to remain a widow eternally loves her children with a double love – once because they are her children and once more because she sees her husband surviving, as it were, in them. But the woman who remarries immediately transfers to her new mate a great part of her attention – and then, if there are new children, what is left of her attention is diverted to them.

Finally, even if a woman in this situation should remain ardent in her love for her children, she does not have the time or opportunity to manifest this love in her actions. The celibacy of which I speak will be the more praised if the widow in question aims thereby not so much to assure her children riches and high position but to bring them up in a way conducive to holiness and lives of integrity. Just as the first praise therefore must go to a young bereaved widow who because of the zeal for piety towards God fails to remarry, so the woman who has retained no children as pledges from her dead husband has a greater excuse for remarrying, for the wish for progeny obviates the suspicion that it is her own desire that has overtaken her.

To the third order of widows belong those who, conscious of their own weakness, by remarrying flee hell-fire lest they perish in Sodom, fleeing with Lot into the city of Zoar,[255] a city great and not great – great with respect to the number of its inhabitants, but not great with respect to outstanding virtue. These women merit no praise, but they are entitled to kind consideration. To these, however, it is not denied to counterbalance their human weakness with good deeds, so that in this they are equal to the first kind of widow, or even to virgins. But as for the others, who abstain from marriage neither out of love of piety nor out of concern for their children, but only in order to live at greater liberty under their own jurisdiction and do whatever they like – these are so far from deserving praise for their self-restraint that indeed they deserve no tolerance nor do they escape the taint of criminality. For this is a way not of embracing continence but rather of loosing the reins of concupiscence.

I return now to you, Mary, renowned for your royal descent, conspicuous for your pious zeal, a woman with whose station in life these precepts may not seem to correspond in all particulars. Although this treatise is dedicated to you alone, however, it is none the less written as if it were not for a single individual; rather these counsels are inscribed with your name so that the lesson of your precept and example will flow to many people. To be sure you have, as I understand, no children; but there is no lack of nieces and nephews, young ladies of your household, and matrons whom your authority may refine in the discipline of piety. Indeed, the more exalted the station in which God has placed you, the more widely your good works will extend, the more people the light of your piety will inflame to purity in their lives. Whatever the masses catch sight of in their rulers they will imitate eagerly. Men will be ashamed not to do what they see can be done by a woman, and women of lesser nobility will be ashamed not to do what they see done by a girl who is the daughter, sister, and niece of so many kings and emperors.

Finally this sort of widowhood arises not from one's external situation but rather from within. For God appears to seek a special closeness with women whose husbands he has taken away. He desires that every human be joined closely with him; but souls that are not 'widowed' and 'desolate' of all worldly connections will not find their consolation in the world to come. She is not desolate who possesses something in this world to which she may affix the anchor of her hope, which she dearly loves, which if some chance should snatch it away from her she will lament that she is wretched without it. The soul that trusts in riches, in honour, in noble descent, in temporal power, in the pleasures of this world – she is no widow, but rather has a husband whom she would like to live forever. Similarly the soul that places its hope in famous parents, in children, in bodily strength, or in youth is no widow, and indeed God often propitiously takes these comforts away from us so that he may draw to himself those who have been wrenched away from the love of these things: he is jealous, and wants to be loved alone and with people's whole hearts. Thus it is that women who have been joined to husbands cannot have hope in the Lord unless they become widows.[256] But she who has not placed her hope in the Lord will not reign alongside the Lord. For without hope 'it is impossible to please God.'[257]

If you ask how it can be that the same person is at the same time both widow and wife, I will explain this easily. The woman who loves her mortal husband in such a way that because of her love for him she neglects those things that pertain to piety – this woman has but one spouse, and that a mortal one, whom she none the less loves as if he were immortal. And as long as she enjoys this spouse, she is no widow, nor is she worthy of Christ as a spouse. But the widow who, according to the teaching of Paul, has a husband in such a way as if she did not, and stations the garrison of her happiness not in a man who is mortal and perchance a sinner but rather in God, to whom she is joined in her mind by a faith even more holy – this sort of woman is desolate and a widow even while she is married.[258]

Nor indeed does that celestial Spouse vitiate a marriage as if by adultery when he is received into that conjugal relationship; rather he renders that very corporeal alliance holier and more auspicious. Indeed those into whose relationship he has not been received are joined together more in fornication than in marriage. Nor does Paul mean that only widows must 'hope in the Lord,' as if virgins and matrons were exempted; all must hope in him, but such hope is impossible unless one is in spirit a 'widow,' that is, possesses what he has in this world in such a manner as if he did not possess it.[259] For whatever the stage of this world displays is flimsy and ephemeral, and however great and everlasting it seems, in the contemplation of the eternal scheme of things it is ordinary and evanescent. These things the Scriptures set before us in the name of widows, because the female sex is almost entirely accustomed to depend on the protection of some man until by the spirit of Christ it is constituted a 'new creation.'[260] Nor do my words seek to encourage any Christian woman to love her spouse less or be less obedient to her husband. On the contrary, she will love him all the more and all the more truly if she loves him in the Lord, and she will obey him all the more devoutly if she recognizes that the submission she offers to her husband she is offering not to a mortal but to God.

The sacred Scripture moreover seeks not only to teach by the example of a widowed woman 'all who wish to live devoutly in Christ Jesus,'[261] calling their faith back from secular things to eternal ones; it wishes also to console women bereft of beloved husbands. At the side of the woman tearing her hair and crying out in true female fashion: 'Oh, I am desolate! Why should I go on living?' is the Scripture in the role of a comforter saying: 'You are not alone. I am here who can be more powerful than hundreds of husbands; there is no reason for you to hand yourself over into the power of some man henceforth. You may keep yourself entirely for me alone, and the more you adhere to that which contains all good things, the less desolate you will be. And to that end, I have snatched your husband away, so that there should be nothing to keep us from the sweetest of embraces.' A widow embraces this celestial Spouse and kisses him with all her heart as often as she prays, glorifying him and giving thanks; she speaks with him as often as she reads the sacred text and receives its word in to her inmost being. From such things mortal marriage does not distract totally, but as a general rule it either interrupts this deeper familiarity with God or at least puts a damper on it – though not every widow is thus joined with the Lord, but only she who is a true widow. For thus St Paul wrote: 'She who is truly desolate and a widow hopes in God and persists in supplications and prayers by night and by day.'[262] I do not know how 'by night and by day' can apply to those who are married except as it refers to those who by mutual consent have cut themselves off from normal marital relations. Just therefore as nothing forbids one from living like a widow while married, so nothing prohibits anyone in any style of life from living like a Christian.

For whoever is reborn in the baptismal font renounces this world and all its pomp and pleasures. But just as it is the disposition of our soul that separates us from the things of this world, and not physical distance, so our contempt for pomp and pleasures sets us apart from them. And it often happens indeed that those who live in the middle of nowhere and are hard pressed by poverty are richer and more refined than others whom either high station or noble birth or some other other necessity holds fast in self-indulgence. For a person must be inwardly laden with money and luxuries if he cannot cease loving them even when necessity has deprived him of them in fact. Temperance, on the other hand, is all the more illustrious in the person who is not corrupted by the presence of abundance but rather resembles the fishes of the sea, which are more delicate than those of the rivers and bear no trace of the ocean salt. And so a widow, though she be renowned, though she be wealthy, though she live in a great palace, is desolate; and she fixes her hope in the Lord and persists in prayers and supplications by day and by night if she has transferred her faith from temporal things to God; if looking around her she finds no true refuge, no true joy, except in the Lord; if, as often as the opportunity is offered, she rejoices in speaking with the Lord, rejoices in hearing the words of the Lord; if, in short, she places all her deeds and thoughts and desires in the context of her relationship with God.

Nor was the Apostle referring to widows alone when he went on to say: 'The widow who lives in worldly pleasures knows a living death.'[263] And does not a wife who lives in worldly pleasures endure a living death? Indeed, whoever among mortals lives in worldly pleasures endures a living death. For in the opinion of these voluptuaries only a life of pleasure can truly be called life. But such a life is death, if we believe Paul. The true widow, by contrast, who is dead to this world not in her body but in her affections – she by virtue of being dead in this way is truly alive. The same may be said of other stations of life: unless a woman is truly bereft and her children orphans, they do not have hope in the Lord. Nor is it the woman who has buried her children who is bereft of them, but rather she who possesses them as gifts from God and will return them with equanimity whenever he should demand them back. And they are orphans who have placed the anchor of their salvation not in their parents but in the heavenly Father.

Now at this juncture the people will cry out: 'Who is there who does not place his faith in the Lord?' For this is how we all talk when things are going along peacefully. When those whom we were wont to love have been snatched away, however, it becomes clear where the anchor was really fixed. But if you have not placed the bulwark of your happiness in your husband, why when he has died do you tear your hair, beat your breast, and keep crying out that you are wretched – yea, even that you are yourself dead? You loved him as if he had been immortal. But you, a mortal woman, married a mortal man. You loved him as if he were able to confer on you the blessed happiness that God alone can provide. If you had loved your husband in God, if you had loved God in the highest degree above all things, surely you would bear it calmly – though, of course, with difficulty, because of the weakness of the flesh – when he was snatched away by him who had given him, thinking to yourself: 'May God be praised in all things; perhaps it is best for my husband that he be removed from this life, and perhaps it is best also for me.'

He alone knows what for each individual leads to eternal salvation. Nor should one speak differently at the death of parents, of brothers and sisters, of children. May praise be given to the words of two pagans who, when they had learnt of the death of their son, stood fast and replied calmly: 'I bore him as a mortal.' And let a husband think: 'I am marrying a mortal woman.' Let a wife think: 'I am marrying a mortal man.' May a father think: 'I am begetting children who will die,' and let a mother also realize she is giving birth to such children. I do not demand that a woman smile at the death of her husband; I do not deny her the right of lamentation or seek to check her tears, for some allowance must be made for natural human emotions: but that continual, inconsolable mourning – not only is it pointless and offensive; we must ask whence it arises if not from impiety? Why bewail something as if it were a novelty that in fact happens to each and every one of us and is never out of our sight?

But I do not direct these remarks to you, illustrious young woman; I know that your suffering is so mitigated by your piety that it neither deserves nor needs to be criticized, and I do not doubt either that you are accustomed to apply either these very remedies or even still stronger medicines to others who indulge their grief beyond what is proper. Truly your mind is so fortified by your strong faith that it is able to stand firm, protected by that faith, in the face of whatever misfortunes chance may bring. Indeed, your own fortunes have been so happy that if we were to add up the account of sadness and joy we should find many more reasons to congratulate you than to console you; and of all the good things in your life – and there are many – nowhere are you more fortunate than in the praise you receive for your piety. Other things are either outside us, or not in our power, or purely temporal. But what you possess no adversity can snatch away, and it will remain with you perpetually in the life that lies ahead of you.

Go forth, then, illustrious woman, to uphold the standard of piety for all widows and all high-born ladies and, following in the footsteps of women who have been highly praised, be at once the teacher of the court of princes and an example of evangelical integrity. May it thus befall you with Judith and other noble matrons whose praises we have celebrated to enjoy your eternal Spouse Jesus Christ. Several years ago I dedicated the *Institutio principis christiani* to Charles, now emperor, and recently the paraphrase on John to Prince Ferdinand, now the king of Hungary and Bohemia, to both of whom I owe everything, both public and private. More recently indeed I inscribed the *Institutio christiani matrimonii* to your maternal aunt, the queen of England, not because these people needed my advice, but so that if there were any value in these works, they would be commended to all by their illustrious titles. And that I might dedicate this little book to you, that man of singular piety Johann Henckel has exhorted me in letters, warmly and more than once, a man whose outstanding dedication in preaching the truth of the gospel your generosity has nourished.[264] And if he did not deceive me, you will graciously accept this work – though you do not, certainly, need it – as it contains counsels that will be of help to others in the future. My final need is to beg your indulgence, which I do with three excuses: I have composed this piece under orders, I have composed it to the best of my ability, I have composed it with good will. May the Lord fill your Highness and all widows with every spiritual joy. Amen.

The End

This page intentionally left blank

Notes

Introduction

ix

1 Allen Ep 2283. See also CWE 24 694–702; C. Reedijk 'Erasmus' Final Modesty' in *Actes du congrès Erasme, Rotterdam 27–29 octobre 1969* (Amsterdam 1971) 174–92.

2 See CWE 23 xi–xviii.

xi

3 Allen Ep 1211. See now especially *Erasme: Vies de Jean Vitrier et de John Colet* ed André Godin (Angers 1982).

4 Ep 858 8 below

5 *Apologia contra Latomi dialogum* (LB IX 90A): 'Theologia est pietas, cum ratione de divinis rebus loquendi coniuncta.' See Georges Chantraine 'L'Apologia ad Latomum: Deux conceptions de la théologie' in *Scrinium* II 51–75.

6 O'Donnell *Enchiridion* xliv–xlv

xii

7 See eg Joseph de Guibert *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica* (Rome 1926).

8 See eg Craig R. Thompson 'Better Teachers than Scotus or Aquinas' in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* ed John L. Lievsay (Durham, NC 1968) 114–45; Jean-Pierre Massaut 'Erasme et saint Thomas' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* II 581–611.

9 See eg 'Fourth rule' in the *Enchiridion* 62 below.

xiii

10 *Phoenix of His Age* (Toronto 1979)

11 Jean-Claude Dhotel *Les origines du Catéchisme moderne d'après les premiers manuels imprimés en France* (Paris 1967)

12 Coppens 'Portrait' 569–98; Massaut 'Histoire' 454; Halkin 'Erasme critique' 184; my 'Egidio da Viterbo and Renaissance Rome' in *Egidio da Viterbo, O.S.A., e il suo tempo* (Rome 1983) 81

xiv

13 Among works strongly urging this viewpoint are Kohls *Theologie*; C.J. de Vogel

'Erasmus and His Attitude towards Church Dogma' in *Scrinium* II 101–32; Coppens 'Portrait' 569–98; Chantraine *'Mystère'*; Manfred Hoffman *Erkenntnis und Verwirklichung der wahren Theologie nach Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Tübingen 1972); Massaut 'Histoire'; Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto 1977). See also Josef IJsewijn 'Erasmus ex Poeta theologus sive de literarum instauratarum apud Hollandos incunabulis' in *Scrinium* I 375–89; Paola Zambelli 'Cornelio Agrippa, Erasmo e la theologia umanistica' *Rinascimento* 10 (1970) 29–88; B.A. Gerrish '*De Libero Arbitrio* (1524): Erasmus on Piety, Theology, and the Lutheran Dogma' in DeMolen *Essays* 187–209; Christine Christ-von Wedel *Das Nichtwissen bei Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Basel 1981). Relevant, but more concerned with Luther, are Dietrich Kerlin *Assertio: die Entwicklung von Luthers theologischem Anspruch und der Streit mit Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Wiesbaden 1976); Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls *Luther oder Erasmus: Luthers Theologie in der Auseinandersetzung mit Erasmus* 2 vols (Basel 1972–8); Otto Hermann Pesch *Humanismus und Reformation: Martin Luther und Erasmus von Rotterdam in den Konflikten ihrer Zeit* (Freiburg-Munich-Zürich 1985).

14 Godin *Erasme* 583–4

15 Craig R. Thompson CWE 23 xxiv. See also Stupperich 'Enchiridion.'

16 See also Charles Trinkaus 'Erasmus, Augustine and the Nominalists' ARG 67 (1976) 5–32; Peter Iver Kaufman *Augustinian Piety and Catholic Reform: Augustine, Colet and Erasmus* (Macon 1982).

17 See also his '*Enchiridion*.'

18 Rice *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore 1985) 116–36; John C. Olin 'Erasmus and the Church Fathers' in his *Six Essays* 33–47 and 'Erasmus and Saint Jerome: The Close Bond and Its Significance' ERSY 7 (1987) 33–53; Joseph Coppens 'Le portrait de saint Jérome d'après Erasme' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* II 821–8

19 'Erasme et saint Basile' *Irénikon* 52 (1979) 451–90. I have not been able to consult Juliusz Domański 'Patristic Sources of the Philosophy of Christ: St. John Chrysostom and the Erasmian Concept of Philosophy' in *Actes du Symposium de Cracovie* (27–9 September 1969).

20 See eg CWE 42; C. Augustijn '*Hyperaspistes I*: La doctrine d'Erasme et de Luther sur la "Claritas Scripturae"' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* II 737–48; J. Hadot 'La critique textuelle dans l'édition du Nouveau Testament d'Erasme' ibidem 749–60; Georges Chantraine 'Erasme, lecteur des Psaumes' ibidem 691–712 and 'Le mustérion paulinien selon les Annotations d'Erasme' RSR 58 (1970) 351–82; C.A.L. Jarrott 'Erasmus' Biblical Humanism' *Studies in the Renaissance* 17 (1970) 119–52; Albert Rabil jr *Erasmus and the New Testament* (San Antonio 1972); H.J. de Jonge 'Erasmus und die *Glossa Ordinaria* zum Neuen Testament' *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* n s 56 (1975) 51–77; Jerry H. Bentley *Humanists and Holy Writ* (Princeton 1983) 112–93; Friedhelm Krüger *Humanistische Evangelienauslegung* (Tübingen 1986); E. Rummel *Erasmus' 'Annotations' on the New Testament* (Toronto 1986) and 'God and Solecism: Erasmus as a Literary Critic of the Bible' ERSY 7 (1987) 54–72.

21 Important as an early statement on the issue was de Vogel in *Scrinium* II 101–32.

22 *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond 1970)

23 See eg E.J. Devereux 'Tudor Uses of Erasmus on the Eucharist' ARG 62 (1971) 38–52 and Michael Kunzler *Die Eucharistietheologie des Hadamarer Pfarrers und Humanisten Gerhard Lorich: Eine Untersuchung der Frage nach einer Erasmischen Mess- und Eucharistietheologie im Deutschland des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Münster 1981).

24 See eg Kohls *Theologie* I 98–115; Fokke; Tracy 'Humanists'; Halkin 'Mariologie.'

xv

25 See eg Kohls *Theologie* I 158–77; C. Augustijn 'The Ecclesiology of Erasmus' in *Scrinium* II 135–55; Georg Gebhardt *Die Stellung des Erasmus von Rotterdam zur Römischen Kirche* (Marburg 1966); George Hunston Williams 'Erasmus and the Reformers on Non-Christian Religions and *Salus Extra Ecclesiam*' in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe* ed Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Seigel (Princeton 1969) 319–70; Harry J. McSorley 'Erasmus and the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff: Between Conciliarism and Papalism' ARG 65 (1974) 37–54; Willi Hentze *Kirche und kirchliche Einheit bei Desiderius Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Paderborn 1974); Brian Gogan 'The Ecclesiology of Erasmus of Rotterdam: A Genetic Account' *The Heythrop Journal* 21 (1980) 393–411; Manfred Hoffmann, 'Erasmus on Church and Ministry' ERSY 6 (1986) 1–30.

26 Jean-Pierre Massaut 'Erasme, La Sorbonne et la nature de l'Eglise' in *Colloquium Erasmianum* 89–116

27 See Yves M.-J. Congar *L'Eglise: De saint Augustin à l'époque moderne* (Paris 1970).

28 On *De vidua* there is an unsatisfactory discussion in Telle 425–38. On some of the prayers, besides the works listed below concerning translations of the *Precatio dominica*, see Raffaele Scalamandrè *La preghiera* (Milan 1967) 687–701 and Padberg 48ff.

29 Telle

30 Still worth consulting is Massaut 'Humanisme.' Massaut's treatment contrasts sharply with the altogether unsatisfactory pages on the same topic by Richard G. Villoslada, 'Caractères de sa spiritualité,' in the article 'Erasme' in the same series, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* IV (1961) 931–4. See also DeMolen *Spirituality* and the judicious article by Léon-E. Halkin 'La *pieté* d'Erasme' RHE 79 (1984) 671–708.

xvi

31 See Werner L. Gundersheimer 'Erasmus, Humanism, and the Christian Cabala' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26 (1963) 38–52.

32 Quoted of him in Gertrude Himmelfarb *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics* (London 1952) 1

33 Ep 337:807–9

xvii

34 See Pierre Mesnard *Erasme ou le christianisme critique* (Paris 1969) and Halkin 'Erasme critique.'

35 See eg O'Malley *Praise and Blame* 165–94; Guidi; Barry Collett *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation* (Oxford 1985).

36 See eg the letter to Dorp, Ep 337:291–320.

37 See O'Malley *Praise and Blame* 77–122, 161–3, 'Some Renaissance Panegyrics of

Aquinas' *Renaissance Quarterly* 27 (1974) 174–92, and 'The Feast of Thomas Aquinas in Renaissance Rome' *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* 35 (1981) 1–27.

xviii

38 See 127 below.

39 The best discussion of this complex question is Léon-E. Halkin 'Erasme et le célibat sacerdotale' *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 57 (1977) 497–511. See as well Joseph Coppens 'Erasme et le célibat' in *Sacerdos et célibat* ed Joseph Coppens (Gembloux 1971) 443–58.

40 See eg the *Oratio funebris* LB VIII 555 and *De vidua* 197, 211, 215, 219–20, 227–8, 237 below.

41 See *Institutio christiani matrimonii* LB V 696F, 719D. For Trent (Sessio 25), see COD 751–2.

42 See Chantraine *'Mystère'* 297–301.

43 ASD I-3 237:183

44 Ep 858 9 below

xix

45 *Enchiridion* 127 below

46 See eg *De vidua christiana* 201–5 below.

47 Allen Ep 1202:66–104; *Paraclesis* LB V 140A

48 Ep 858 10 below

49 Ep 858 13 below

50 Allen Ep 1976:64. See also eg Allen Ep 1033:236–41.

xx

51 ASD I-3 244:395

52 Ep 858 21 below

53 Ep 858 9–10, 13 below

54 Allen Ep 1976:64–84. See Léon-E. Halkin 'The Ecumenical Vocation of Erasmus' ERSY 7 (1987) 96–109.

55 Allen Epp 1202:9–10, 1334:217. See McConica.

56 See eg my 'Erasmus and Luther, Continuity and Discontinuity as Key to Their Conflict' SCJ 5, 2 (1974) 47–65.

57 See eg Allen Ep 1202.

58 *De officiis* 1.7.22. See *Enchiridion* 93 below.

59 See eg Rudolf Padberg 'Pax Erasmiana: Das politische Engagement und die "politische Theologie" des Erasmus von Rotterdam' in *Scrinium* II 301–12; Pierre Brachin 'Vox clamantis in deserto: Réflexions sur le pacifisme d'Erasme' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* I 247–75; John Olin 'The Pacificism of Erasmus' in his *Six Essays* 17–31; and the collection of texts by Jean-Claude Margolin *Guerre et paix dans la pensée d'Erasme* (Paris 1973).

xxi

60 See McConica. See also Robert Stupperich 'Erasmus und die kirchlichen Autoritäten' *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum* 8 (1976) 346–64.

61 See 98–101 below.

62 See eg Joseph de Guibert *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* trans William J. Young (Chicago 1964); my 'De Guibert and Jesuit Authenticity' *Woodstock Letters* 95 (1966) 103–10 and 'Unterwegs in alle Länder der Welt: Die Berufung des Jesuiten nach Jerónimo Nadal' *Geist und Leben* 59 (1986) 247–60.

63 LB V 140C

64 Ep 858 8 below; *Modus orandi Deum* ASD V-1 154:162–3

xxii

65 See Kohls *Theologie* I 160–71.

66 Allen Ep 1202:9–10: 'Quid enim est aliud nostra religio quam pax in Spiritu sancto?' and Allen Ep 1334:217: 'Summa nostrae religionis pax est et unanimitas.' See O'Malley *Praise and Blame*, especially 228–32.

67 See eg Kohls *Theologie* I 115–26.

68 Ep 858 below. See Chantraine *'Mystère'* and DeMolen *Spirituality*, especially 69–124.

69 LB V 139D, 141D

70 *Paraclesis* LB V 139E

71 LB V 141F: 'Quid autem aliud est Christi philosophia, quam ipse renascentiam vocat, quam instauratio bene conditae naturae?'

72 Ep 337:538–9

73 *Paraclesis* LB V 142D

xxiii

74 *Paraclesis* LB V 138E, 141F, 142D

75 See eg *Precatio* LB V 1211A, 1213A–C.

76 See 26 below. See also eg Payne 155–78 and Kohls *Theologie* I 73–5.

77 On *De libero arbitrio* see Boisset and, especially, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle *Rhetoric* and 'Erasmus and the "Modern" Question: Was He Semi-Pelagian?' ARG 75 (1984) 59–77.

78 The long tradition of this image in works of Christian piety has been amply shown. See especially Linus Hofmann 'Militia Christi: Ein Betrag zur Lehre von den kirchlichen Ständen' *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift* 63 (1954) 76–92; Johann Auer 'Militia Christi: Zur Geschichte eines christlichen Grundbildes' *Geist und Leben* 32 (1959) 340–51 and 'Militia Christi' *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 2nd ed VII (1962) 418–19.

79 See eg Guidi; Massaut 'Humanisme' 1023–4; Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls 'Meditatio mortis chez Pétrarch et Erasme' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* I 303–11; my *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform* (Leiden 1968) 54n.

xxiv

80 'Humanisme' 1008

81 Ep 1039:245–54

82 *Paraclesis* LB V 140E

83 Allen Ep 1211:98

84 See eg *Paraclesis* LB V 140E–F.

xxv

85 See 195, 211, 245–6 below.

86 ASD V-1 292:532–9
87 See 113–27 below.
88 See eg *Convivium religiosum* ASD I-3 255:720–4.
89 See E.J. Devereux 'English Translators of Erasmus, 1522–1557' in *Editing Sixteenth Century Texts* ed R.J. Schoeck (Toronto 1966) 47.

xxvi

90 See O'Malley 'Grammar.'
91 John L. McKenzie 'The Gospel according to Matthew' in JBC II 62
92 See eg *De libero arbitrio* LB IX 1235B; *Convivium religiosum* ASD I-3 246:469–70.
93 LB V 578B. See also *Convivium religiosum* ASD I-3 265:1058–60.
94 See *Summa theologiae* 1.1, where he consistently equates Scripture and the 'articles of faith,' ie, the Creed.
95 *Summa theologiae* 1.1.2
96 LB V 141F
97 LB V 142E
98 LB V 144C

xxvii

99 LB V 144D
100 LB V 1028D
101 See Godin '*Enchiridion*' 50.
102 See eg Charles Béné 'Erasme et Cicéron' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* II 571–9 and Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle *Christening Pagan Mysteries* (Toronto 1981). See also the older work by Walter Rüegg *Cicero und der Humanismus* (Zurich 1946).
103 *Convivium religiosum* ASD I-3 254:710

xxviii

104 See Bultot; Marie Delcourt and Marcell Derwa 'Trois aspects humanistes de l'épicurisme chrétien' in *Colloquium Erasmianum* 119–33; Timmermans.
105 O'Donnell 'Rhetoric' and, more generally, O'Malley 'Grammar'; Jean-Claude Margolin *Erasme: Le Prix des mots et de l'homme* (London 1986); Jacques Chomarat *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Erasme* 2 vols (Paris 1981) and 'Grammar and Rhetoric in the Paraphrases of the Gospels by Erasmus' ERSY 1 (1981) 30–68
106 *Rhetoric*, especially 36–78
107 See O'Malley *Praise and Blame*, especially 36–78.
108 *In Our Image and Likeness* 2 vols (Chicago 1970) I 126–8
109 George A. Kennedy makes the distinction between 'primary rhetoric,' ie, the speech-act, and other forms as applied to texts as such, ie, 'literary rhetoric'; see his *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill 1980) 3–9.

xxix

110 See O.B. Hardison 'The Orator and the Poet: The Dilemma of Humanist Literature' *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1 (1971) 33–44; M.A. Screech *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* (London 1980).

xxx

111 See Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass 1986).

112 See eg Massaut 'Humanisme' 1021–3; O'Malley 'Grammar'; Kohls *Theologie* I 31–2, 70; Bornkamm 215; John F. Tinkler 'Renaissance Humanism and the *genera eloquentiae*' *Rhetorica* 5 (1987) 279–309.

113 'D'Erasme à la Companie de Jésus' *Archives de sociologie des religions* 24 (1967) 57–81. See also John Olin 'Erasmus and St. Ignatius Loyola' in his *Six Essays* 75–92; Terence O'Reilly 'Erasmus, Ignatius Loyola, and Orthodoxy' *The Journal of Theological Studies* n s 30 (1979) 115–27; Mark Rotsaert *Ignace de Loyola et les renouveau spirituelles en Castile au début du XVIe siècle* (Rome 1982) 128–45.

xxxi

114 See eg Bataillon *Erasmo*; Mansfield; *Itinerarium Italicum: The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of Its European Transformations* ed Heiko A. Oberman with Thomas A. Brady (Leiden 1975); Heinz Holeczek *Erasmus Deutsch* I: *Die volkssprachliche Rezeption des Erasmus von Rotterdam in der reformatorischen Öffentlichkeit 1519–1536* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1983), first volume of projected three. See also the various articles in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* I 37–214. For the reception of Erasmus in Italy, see the works cited in O'Malley 'Grammar' n4.

115 *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge 1987)

116 See O'Malley 'Sacred Rhetoric.'

117 See Hubert Jedin *Crisis and Closure of the Council of Trent* (London 1967).

xxxii

118 See my 'Catholic Reform' in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research* ed Steven Ozment (St Louis 1982) 297–319 and Peter Burke 'Popular Piety' in O'Malley *Catholicism*.

119 See Adriano Prosperi '"Otras Indias:" Missionari della Controriforma tra contadini e selvaggi' in *Scienze, Credenze occulte, Livelli di cultura: Convegno internazionale* (Florence 1982) 205–34.

120 See eg John Bossy's influential article 'The Counter-Reformation and the Peoples of Catholic Europe' *Past and Present* 47 (1970) 51–70.

xxxiii

121 LB V 590B–592D

122 LB V 612F–614A

123 Page 255

124 Jean-Claude Margolin introduction to *Encomium matrimonii* ASD I-5 339

125 Page 405. See Payne 109–25.

xxxiv

126 See Emile V. Telle 'Erasme et les marriages dynastiques' BHR 12 (1950) 7–13.

127 ASD I-5 367–81

128 See LB V 1205C–E and *Institutio christiani matrimonii* LB V 623D.

xxxv

129 *Institutio christiani matrimonii* LB V 617B
130 *Institutio christiani matrimonii* LB V 654E
131 See Sowards, especially 83.
132 The translation, with the Latin original on facing page, has been reprinted in 'Erasmus' Paraphrase of the "Pater Noster" (1523) with Its English Translation by Margaret Roper (1524)' ed Germain Marc'hadour *Moreana* 7 (August 1965) 9–64. See also John Arthur Gee 'Margaret Roper's English Version of Erasmus' *Precatio Dominica* and the Apprenticeship behind Early Tudor Translation' *The Review of English Studies* 13 (1937) 257–71 and Augustin Redondo 'La "Precatio Dominica" d'Erasme en castillan: la première version et son auteur' RLC 52 (1978) 223–32.
133 See Allen I 19–20.
134 See Halkin 'Mariologie' and J.M. Alonso CMF *Erasmi Corpus Mariologicum* University of Dayton Marian Library Studies n s 11–12 (Dayton, Ohio 1979–80).
135 LB V 1236B
136 LB V 1234C
137 LB V 1235F
138 LB V 1229F. Cf *Modus orandi Deum* ASD V-1 172:791–5.
139 ASD V-1 97:15–21. He thus interprets the passage from Ezekiel in the *Explanatio symboli* ASD I-1 245:198–241:213. For a recent study of a similar interpretation, see Brian E. Daley 'The "Closed Garden" and the "Sealed Fountain": Song of Songs 4:12 in the Late Medieval Iconography of Mary' in *Medieval Gardens* (Washington 1986) 255–78. Specifically regarding that verse, see *Paean* LB V 1231C.
140 LB V 1200A–D

xxxvi

141 LB V 1230F
142 ASD V-1 163:460–71
143 A. van Heck ASD V-1 333
144 See eg *Institutio christiani matrimonii* LB V 676D–677E.
145 Bietenholz 164
146 LB V 1197A–1198C
147 ASD I-1 318:410–320:451. See also the comment by the editor of the *Modus orandi Deum* on the Lord's Prayer in that work, 116.
148 See eg ASD V-1 169:680–6.
149 ASD V-1 146:879–156:199. The passage is also interesting for Erasmus' clear perception that not all traditional Christian beliefs are found verbatim in Scripture.
150 J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink's introduction to his critical edition provides information on the circumstances of its composition, its structure, sources, and editions until 1540 (ASD V-1 113–19). Bataillon provides information about its impact in Spain (*Erasmo* 572–87).
151 Marcel 638–9, for instance, makes this error. See Allen Ep 1581:762.

xxxvii

152 ASD V-1 116

153 These two works have been studied by Rudolf Padberg *Erasmus als Katechet* (Freiburg 1956). See also Bornkamm; Etchegaray Cruz; Jean-Pierre Belche 'Die Bekehrung zum Christentum nach Augustins Büchlein De Catechizandis Rudibus' *Augustiniana* 27 (1977) 26–69, especially 41–8. See also the introduction to the critical edition by J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink ASD V-1 179–200.
154 van den Brink ASD V-1 184. See also Craig R. Thompson's edition *Inquisitio de Fide: A Colloquy by Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus 1524* 2nd ed (Hamden 1975); Thompson finds 'no significant difference' between the colloquy and the *Explanatio symboli* (76).
155 See eg Paul Grendler 'The Schools of Christian Doctrine in Sixteenth Century Italy' *Church History* 53 (1984) 319–31 and 'Schools, Seminaries and Catechetical Instruction' in O'Malley *Catholicism*. See also *Confessions et catéchismes de la foi réformée* ed Olivier Fatio (Geneva 1986).
156 See van den Brink ASD V-1 182–3.
157 Etchegaray Cruz 182
158 See Pedro Rodriguez and Raul Lanzetti *El Catecismo Romano: Fuentes e historia del texto y de la redacción* (Pamplona 1982) 150–3.
159 van den Brink ASD V-1 183
160 ASD V-1 210:111–18, 236:902–5
161 LB V 160C
162 See Tentler. For a general survey of the issue see Dennis D. Martin 'Popular and Monastic Pastoral Issues in the Later Middle Ages' *Church History* 56 (1987) 320–32.

xxxviii
163 See O'Malley 'Sacred Rhetoric.'
164 *L'âge de l'éloquence: Rhétorique et 'res literaria' de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Geneva 1980) 107: 'L'essence de l'éloquence chrétienne est dans la pieté qui rend le coeur docile à l'imitation de Jésus-Christ.'
165 On this work see Halkin 'Mariologie' and his introduction in ASD V-1 89–92.
166 ASD V-1 96:41
167 See eg Allen Ep 1581:469–80; O'Malley *Praise and Blame* 36–76 and 'Sacred Rhetoric.'
168 LB V 570E: 'Quid est gratia Dei, nisi misericordia Dei?'
169 LB V 579A: 'Confide misericordi, et experieris misericordiam.'

xxxix
170 Allen Ep 1474:2; LB V 557–8, also 559F.
171 On this piece see Fokke and Tracy 'Humanists.' It is discussed also by Giovanni Santinello *Studi sull'Umanesimo Europeo* (Padua 1969) 75–128.
172 See eg Karl Rahner 'Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ' in his *Theological Investigations* trans Karl-H. Kruger V (Baltimore 1966) 193–215. For a discussion specifically of Christ's attitude towards his own death see Walter Kasper *Jesus the Christ* (New York 1976) 113–23.
173 Fokke 185, as well as 183–4.
174 ASD V-1 354:338–53
175 On this work see Bietenholz; Tentler; Tenenti, especially 122–7. There is a

modern French translation by Pierre Sage, with only a brief introduction, *La préparation à la mort* (Montreal 1976).

176 The number of books dealing with the history of attitudes towards death is now large. See eg Guidi; Tenenti; Philippe Ariès *Western Attitudes toward Death* (Baltimore 1974); Jean Delumeau *La peur en Occident XIVe–XVIIIe siècles* (Paris 1978) and *Péché*; Arnold Stein *House of Death: Messages from the English Renaissance* (Baltimore 1986).

177 For its fate in Spain see Bataillon *Erasmo* 558–72, where he indicates a second Spanish translation, dated 1535, not indicated in ASD V-1 335.

178 See Delumeau *Péché* 390.

179 ASD V-1 344:109: 'Nos hanc consolationem infirmi paramus infirmis.'

xl

180 The bibliography is large, and only selected titles can be given here. Reference must be made first of all to the English edition by O'Donnell and the French translation by A.J. Festugière, with a lengthy introduction, as well as to the critical Latin edition by Hajo Holborn, *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus: Ausgewählte Werke* (Munich 1933) 3–135. Attention has already been called to Boisset 647–56; Godin *'Enchiridion'*; Kohls *Theologie* I 69–190; Marcel; O'Donnell 'Rhetoric'; Stupperich 'Enchiridion.' See also Auer; Klaus Guth 'Volksfrömmigkeit im Urteil des Erasmus v. Rotterdam' *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Kirchengeschichte* 70 (1976) 168–92; Peter Iver Kaufman 'John Colet and Erasmus' Enchiridion' *Church History* 46 (1977) 296–312; Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls 'The Principal Theological Thoughts in the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*' in DeMolen *Essays* 61–82; Jean-Claude Margolin 'Interprétation d'un passage de l'*Enchiridion Militis Christiani, Canon Quintus*' in *Actes du congrès Erasme, Rotterdam 27–29 octobre 1969* (Amsterdam 1971) 99–115; Douglas H. Parker 'Religious Polemics and Two Sixteenth Century English Editions of Erasmus *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, 1545–1561' *Renaissance and Reformation* 9 (1973) 94–107; Schottenloher.

181 'Enchiridion' 5–9, 22. See also Bataillon *Erasmo* 190–214.

182 Ep 412:26–28

183 'Enchiridion' 12–15. See Auer and Kohls *Theologie*. Erasmus' dependence on the *Imitation* is also argued by DeMolen *Spirituality* 35–67. See, however, Edmund Colledge 'Erasmus, the Brethren of the Common Life, and the Devotio Moderna' *Erasmus in English* 7 (1975) 2–4.

xli

184 *Imitation* 1.20. See also 1.10.

xlii

185 See 24 below.

186 See the introduction to *Institutes of the Christian Religion* ed John T. McNeill, trans Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia 1960) I li.

xliii

187 See 30–8 below.

188 See 34 below.

189 See James D. Tracy *Erasmus: The Growth of a Mind* (Geneva 1972).
190 See n78 above and Festugière 37–9.

xliv
191 *Enchiridion* xviii
192 See 24 below.
193 See 101 below.
194 See O'Malley *Praise and Blame* 168–72.
195 *Utopia* ed Edward Surtz (New Haven and London 1964) 38–52

xlv
196 'Une première rédaction du "De contemptu mundi" d'Erasme dans un manuscript de Zwolle' *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 30 (1981) 40–54
197 Ep 1194 134 below. DeMolen does not accept that Haverals' discovery changes the state of the question (*Spirituality* 138–9n).
198 See 2 below.

xlvi
199 ASD V-1 35–6
200 The text has been reproduced in a facsimile edition with an introduction by William James Hirten (Gainesville 1967).

xlvii
201 Allen I 18:5–18
202 Allen 2283:121 / CWE 24 700
203 ASD V-1 3–17
204 ASD V-1 30–4. See also Kohls *Theologie* I 19–34.
205 See 165 below.
206 See 143 below.

xlviii
207 See Ferdinand Vander Haeghen *Bibliotheca Erasmiana: Répertoire des oeuvres d'Erasme* (Ghent 1893) I 180; Erasmus *Obras escogidas* ed Lorenzo Riber (Madrid 1956) 349–411.
208 Pages 425–38
209 Allen Ep 2011:23–52. On Henckel see CEBR II 175–6.
210 PL 16 247–76; see 200 below.
211 Jerome Ep 54 *De viduitate servanda* PL 22 550–60; Augustine *De bono viduitatis* PL 40 431–50. Erasmus doubted Augustine's authorship of this work ibidem 429–30. For other early Christian texts see Josephine Mayer ed *Monumenta de viduis diaconissis virginibusque tractantia* Florilegium Patristicum 42 (Bonn 1938).
212 See 207 below.
213 *De viduis* 4.23 PL 16 254–5. 'Docemur itaque triplicem castitatis esse virtutem: unam coniugalem, aliam viduitatis, tertiam virginitatis; non enim aliam sic praedicamus, ut excludamus alias. Suis quibusque professionibus ista conducunt.'

xlix
214 LB VIII 551–60. On Berta see CEBR II 189–90.

215 See 187 below.
216 See 189 below. On 'painting with words' (*ekphrasis*) in the Renaissance see O'Malley *Praise and Blame* 63–5, with bibliography.

1

217 See 241–53 below. On widows in the New Testament and early Christian history see H. Leclercq 'Veuvage, veuve' in DACL XV, 2 3007–26.
218 See 232 below.
219 See 218 below.

THE HANDBOOK OF THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER / *ENCHIRIDION MILITIS CHRISTIANI*

Introductory note

2

1 Allen I 19
2 Since there is no single English word to express both meanings, I have chosen to use the more common title of 'handbook.' In the face of this quandary the first translators into English devised different solutions. The 1533 translation used the term 'manuell,' but in the revised 1534 translation this was changed to the 'hansome [handy, or ready to hand] weapon.'

3

3 The most important borrowings from Origen are reported in the notes. A more exhaustive listing of sources may be found in the 'reading grid' of related passages from Erasmus and Origen drawn up by André Godin in '*Enchiridion*' 75–6.

4

4 Cf A.J. Lamping *Ulrichus Velenus and His Treatise against the Papacy* (Leiden 1976).
5 The Dutch translations are discussed in Willem de Vreese 'De nederlandsche vertalingen van Desiderius Erasmus' *Het Boek* 24 (1936–7) 71–100 and Simon Willem Bijl *Erasmus in het Nederlands tot 1617* (Nieuwkoop 1978) 57–79.
6 A single exemplar of this first edition is extant in the Biblioteca Pública e Arquivo Distrital of Evora, Portugal. An undated printing from Alcalá, probably of 1526, was reprinted with commentary by Dámaso Alonso, *El Enquiridion o Manual del Caballero cristiano* (Madrid 1932).

5

7 There is a story, not universally accepted, related by the biographer of St Ignatius Loyola, Pedro Ribadeneira, that the saint had been urged by his confessor, Pedro Meyona, to read the *Enchiridion*, but, upon hearing that there were many controversies concerning its author, he never read it, preferring his beloved *Imitation of Christ*. Cf Pedro Ribadeneira *Vita Ignatii Loiolae* (Ingolstadt 1589) 49; John C. Olin 'Erasmus and St Ignatius Loyola' in J.C. Olin ed

Luther, Erasmus and the Reformation: A Catholic-Protestant Reappraisal (New York 1969) 114–33.

8 Margaret Mann Phillips *Erasme et les débuts de la réforme française* (Paris 1934) 119

9 Marcel 643. In support of the attribution is a reference by Erasmus in a letter of 15 June 1525 to a translation of the *Enchiridion* done by de Berquin (Ep 1581:760–1).

6

10 The influence of the *Enchiridion* in certain works of Ortensio Lando written in the 1550s is described in Silvana Seidel Menchi 'Sulla fortuna di Erasmo in Italia' *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 24 (1974) 597–604.

11 E.J. Devereux *Renaissance English Translations of Erasmus* (Toronto 1983) 104

12 John Foxe *Acts and Monuments* (London 1563) 514, quoted in O'Donnell *Enchiridion* xlix

13 By Monmouth's own testimony it is known that two copies were preserved, one sent to the abbess of Dennye and the other to Bishop John Fisher; see *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* ed J.S. Brewer et al (London 1862–1932) IV no 4282. It is possible that one copy could have found its way into the hands of Thomas Cromwell, who made use of Byddell's press in 1533, but secure evidence is lacking.

14 O'Donnell *Enchiridion* liii

15 All of these sixteenth-century editions are based on the 1534 edition.

7

16 Festugière; Werner Welzig *Handbüchlein eines christlichen Streiters* (Graz 1961); Juliusz Domański *Podrłęcznik zołnierza chrystusowego* (Warsaw 1965)

17 'The Enchiridion (Handbook of the Christian Soldier)' trans Ford Lewis Battles in *Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus* ed Matthew Spinka (Philadelphia 1953) 295–379; 'The Handbook of the Militant Christian' in *The Essential Erasmus* ed and trans John P. Dolan (New York 1964) 24–93; *The Enchiridion of Erasmus* trans Raymond Himelick (Bloomington 1963).

18 *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, Ausgewählte Werke* (Munich 1933) 3–135.

Prefatory letter (1518)

8

1 This prefatory letter is Ep 858, trans R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thomson.

2 Johann Poppenruyter; cf Epp 164, 698, and 24 n1 below.

3 At least nine times

4 Reading *quoniam*

5 Ulysses symbolizes restlessness and countless misfortunes; Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, symbolizes unbroken felicity.

6 The Franciscan John Duns Scotus (d 1308) probably represents here scholastic philosophy in general; cf Ep 798:24n.

9

7 The *Sententiarum libri quattuor* of Peter Lombard (d 1164)

8 Cf Ep 575:34–7.
9 Jacques Desparts (or Jacobus a Partibus) of Tournai (d 1458) was a physician, teacher, and canon of Notre Dame in Paris who left an enormous commentary on Avicenna, part of which was published in 1498; see *Dictionnaire de biographie française* ed J. Balteau et al (Paris 1933–)
10 The second part of the second book of the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas was often published separately as an authoritative manual of ethics.
11 Cf Rom 5:5.
12 Cf below 19 and n54.
13 Cf 1 Cor 8:11; Rom 14:15.
14 Prov 1:1, etc

10

15 Cf Ep 785:32–8.
16 A random assortment of scholastic theologians; cf Ep 844:199n. William of Ockham (d 1349); Durandus of Saint-Pourçain (c 1270–1334); John Duns Scotus; Gabriel Biel (c 1425–1495); Alvaro Pelayo (d 1352); cf Ep 575:37n.
17 The Subtle Doctor is the Franciscan John Duns Scotus; the Seraphic is St Bonaventure.
18 The ruler of the realm of the dead, later identified with Pluto

11

19 Cf John 18:36–7.

12

20 *Adagia* IV ix 39
21 2 Tim 1:6; Rom 12:20
22 Gen 26:19; John 7:38
23 Ovid *Metamorphoses* 2.769. Poppenruyter owned a gun-foundry at Mechelen.
24 1 Cor 10:4
25 Cf Gen 26:14–33.

13

26 Jer 2:13
27 For Erasmus' recent acquaintance with Luther's Ninety-five Theses on indulgences see below and Ep 785:39n. For Luther's reaction to this preface cf Ep 933:22–7.
28 Matt 6:22
29 Matt 5:15

14

30 Cf McConica; P.G. Bietenholz *History and Biography in the Work of Erasmus of Rotterdam* (Geneva 1966) 85–6.
31 Rev 14:4
32 Cf Augustine *Letters* 100, 133–4, 139, 204 (PL 33 366–7, 509–12, 535–7, 939–42).
33 Cf Matt 22:17–22.
34 Cf John 8:7.

35 Cf Luke 13:1–3.
36 Cf Luke 12:13–15.
37 Matt 22:13–29

15

38 Luke 9:55
39 Matt 16:23
40 Mark 9:33–49
41 Matt 5:5, 39, 44, etc
42 Cf *De civitate Dei* 5.21 (PL 41 167–8).

16

43 Gal 4:19
44 Such as Thomas More

17

45 Cf 1 Pet 5:2–3.

18

46 Name used since the second century for some independent sects of Judaeo-Christians
47 The second-century followers of Marcion, noted for severe asceticism and the rejection of marriage
48 Cf *De doctrina christiana* 2.31.48 (PL 34 57–8).
49 Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, the third of the great centres of pilgrimage
50 Cf Augustine *Letters* 22.1.3.

19

51 Cf Ep 908:11–18, Allen Ep 1053:421–40 and corresponding note in CWE.
52 Cf *Adagia* I i 8.
53 Cf Ep 447:515–18; Augustine *Regula ad servos Dei* 6 (PL 32 1380).
54 Cf Epp 541:149–70n, 694 introduction, 891:33.

20

55 In Titus 3:1, meaning 'submissive'
56 Gal 5:13
57 1 Pet 2:16
58 Cf Rom 16:18.
59 A brotherhood of ascetic Jews at the time of Christ
60 Note the reference to Erasmus' personal experience; Ep 447:714–15, 734–5.
61 Cf Matt 23:15; Ep 447:26–37.
62 Rev 5:12

21

63 The passage 'If anyone ... and such its patriarchs' was added by Erasmus in 1529.
64 St Basil the Great formulated the rules of monastic life. St John Chrysostom (c 347–407) wrote several works concerning monastic life, including *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*.

65 Cf Jerome *Letters* 46.10 (PL 22 490).

22

66 The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were basic to Christian monasticism.

23

67 Luke 18:12

68 Luke 17:10

69 Acts 5:29

70 The bulk of the *Enchiridion* text was probably already set in type when this letter was added. The date of July is given in the colophon of Froben's edition, but a brief advertisement in the name of the printer on the second-last leaf is dated 19 August 1518.

71 Since the first edition some minor texts had been published jointly with the *Enchiridion* (cf Ep 93). Two more were freshly added in Froben's edition: Ep 110 (from Colet) and a translation from Basil (cf Ep 229).

72 Johannes Sapidus (Witz), master of the school at Sélestat; see Ep 323 introduction.

73 Just before Erasmus arrived in Basel, on 11 May 1518 Jakob Wimpfeling (cf Ep 224 introduction) wrote a letter to Bruno and Basilius Amerbach and Johann Froben (AK II Ep 615), stating his reasons for not coming to Basel and offering them for publication an oration on the character of the Swiss addressed to Maximilian I. He hoped the Swiss would not be offended, seeing that Erasmus had treated them much more harshly in his *Adagia* II viii 65 (see Ep 855:4n). Wimpfeling's oration was apparently declined. Its gist was, according to his letter, that the Swiss should come to terms with the Empire and that both should join with the other European powers for a crusade against the Turks; cf Ep 891:26n.

74 The topic was treated in Wimpfeling's *De integritate libellus* (Strasbourg: J. Knobloch 1505), which caused lengthy controversies; cf Charles Schmidt *Histoire littéraire de l'Alsace* (Paris 1879) 149–54.

75 For Johann Ruser and other members of the Sélestat literary society see Ep 302.

The Handbook of the Christian Soldier

24

1 The Strasbourg edition of the *Lucubrationes*, printed by Matthias Schürer in 1515, has the superscription 'To John the German, friend at court.' He has been identified as Johann Poppenruyter, a cannon founder of Mechelen, by O. Schottenloher 'Erasmus, Johann Poppenreuter und die Entstehung des *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*' ARG 45, 1 (1954) 109–16; cf Ep 164 introduction. The first paragraph of that letter is identical with the introductory paragraph of the *Enchiridion*. Festugière rejects this thesis, calling it 'le roman de Poppenreuter' (33–4).

One must be vigilant in life

1 Job 7:1
2 Terence *Heautontimorumenos* 342; *Adagia* I viii 19

25

3 Hercules dipped his arrows in the poisonous blood of the Hydra, making every wound they inflicted incurable.
4 An Attic hero, whose throw of the javelin was unerring. Cf Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.672–805.
5 Eph 6:16
6 1 John 5:19
7 Cf Virgil *Eclogues* 3.92; *Aeneid* 5.84.
8 Gen 3:15
9 Cf Augustine's commentary on Gen 3:15, *Enarratio in Psalmos* 48 PL 37 1060.
10 Rom 7:18–24
11 Cf 1 Cor 15:47.
12 Referring to Argus, a hundred-eyed giant set to watch Io after Zeus had turned her into a heifer; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.625–7
13 Horace *Satires* 2.5.38; Persius *Satires* 4.18; *Adagia* II iv 75
14 Potted plants offered to Adonis, thus symbolizing short-lived pleasures; *Adagia* I i 4
15 Jer 4:10, 6:14, 8:11

26

16 Isa 48:22, 57:21
17 2 Cor 6:14
18 Paul is the first to use the term 'soldier of Jesus Christ' (1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:3–5, 4:7–8). After him it is used frequently by the early Fathers of the church – Origen, Tertullian, and especially Cyprian in his letter to the faithful in Thibar in Tunisia (Ep 56 PL 4 366–7). Cf also Lorenzo Valla *De professione religiosorum* 121. The military metaphor in early Christian literature is the subject of Adolf Harnack's *Militia Christi* (Tübingen 1905). See also n78 of John O'Malley's introduction.
19 Baptism
20 Erasmus here uses the word *sacramentum* in the double sense of 'military oath of allegiance' and 'sacrament.'
21 Cf 1 Peter 1:18–19.
22 Luke 11:23; Matt 12:30
23 Rom 6:23

27

24 Cf Heb 11:6.
25 The *ἀγωνοθέτης* was also the judge of the contests. Origen uses the same figure in *De principiis* 3.2.3 PG 11 307A–308C.
26 *Iliad* 23.259
27 *Aeneid* 5.109

28 1 Cor 2:9
29 Cf also Augustine *Enchiridion* 108 PL 40 282.
30 Cf Matt 11:12; Luke 16:16.
31 *Iliad* 22.395ff

28

32 Cf Matt 4:4; Deut 8:3.
33 Cf Rom 1:21.
34 A hymn used in the liturgy of Maundy Thursday. Cf *Analecta hymnica* XII 24.
35 1 John 4:8
36 Cf 1 Cor 12:26.
37 Matt 23:27

29

38 Ps 5:9 (Vulg 5:11)
39 Cf 1 Cor 6:19, 3:16.
40 Cf Plato *Cratylus* 400C, *Gorgias* 493A.
41 Matt 12:34
42 John 6:68
43 Cf Eph 6:12.
44 Rom 8:31
45 Cf 1 Cor 15:54–7; 1 John 5:4–5.
46 Cf Phil 4:12–13.

30

47 Erasmus does not employ here the scholastic distinction between 'congruous' and 'condign' merit; he uses it later in his *De libero arbitrio* in refutation of Luther.
48 Cf 1 John 3:5.
49 John 16:33
50 *Adagia* I v 4 CWE 31 387

The armour of the Christian militia

1 Literally a finger's breadth; cf *Adagia* I v 6.
2 Peoples encountered by the Jews in the land of Canaan and surrounding regions; cf Deut 7:1 and Gen 15:20. The interpretation of the seven tribes as symbols of the seven capital sins was made by Cassian *Conlationes* 5.16–24 PG 49 632C–640A.
3 More accurately called the seven capital sins, sources from which other sins arise. They are usually listed, following the order given by Gregory the Great in *Moralia* 31.45.87 PL 76 620C–621A, as pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust.
4 1 Thess 5:17; Eph 6:18

31

5 Horace *Ars poetica* 409–10

6 James 1:6
7 Matt 20:22
8 Exod 17:11
9 Matt 6:7
10 1 Cor 14:19. Erasmus here substitutes *in spiritu* for the Vulgate reading *in lingua,* a literal translation of the Greek. In his *Novum Testamentum* LB VI 732A his text reads *lingua,* but in the *Annotationes* he glosses it *in spiritu.* He seems to have in mind a previous verse of the Epistle, in which Paul contrasts the spirit and the mind: 'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is without fruit' (1 Cor 14:14). He glosses *spiritus orat* in that passage as *lingua sonat pia verba,* 'the tongue utters pious words.' In the usual modern interpretation of verse 19 the Vulgate reading *in lingua* is understood as referring to the charismatic gift of tongues, an ecstatic utterance, completely unintelligible to both the speaker and the hearer. Erasmus seems to prefer the reading *in spiritu* in the literal sense of the mere emission of breath or air (cf *Ratio verae theologiae* LB V 124A), the simple recitation of prayers without understanding. In his long commentary on the text he inveighs against those who sing the psalms with such noisy musical accompaniment that the words cannot even be heard. Cf 21 below.
11 Exod 14:15
12 Ps 121 (Vulg 120):1
13 Exod 17:9
14 Ibidem 16:14–35
15 Ibidem 17:5–7. Cf Origen *In Exodum homiliae* 7.5 PG 12 346BC.

32
16 Ps 23 (Vulg 22):5
17 Cf 2 Tim 3:16.
18 Exod 16:14
19 John 6:60
20 Exod 16:15
21 Cf Ps 23 (Vulg 22):2.
22 Cf Sir 24:30.
23 Cf Ezek 47:5–12.
24 Cf Gen 26:18.
25 Exod 15:27
26 Cf John 4:6.
27 Ibidem 9:7
28 Ibidem 13:5

33
29 Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2
30 Cf Augustine *De doctrina christiana* 2.40.60 PL 34 63.
31 *Odyssey* 12.45
32 *Ad adulescentes: Sermo de legendis libris Gentilium* PG 31 563–90
33 Augustine *Letters* 26 PL 33 103
34 *Letters* 70.2 PL 22 666. Jerome refers allegorically to *Deuteronomy* 21:10–13,

where the Israelites are permitted to take female captives if they shave their heads and pare their nails.

35 Cited by Augustine *De doctrina christiana* 2.40.61 pl 34 64.
36 Exod 18:24. Jethro gave Moses good practical advice without being divinely inspired. Erasmus often uses this example; cf Ep 182:146.
37 Literally 'with unwashed feet,' *Adagia* I ix 54
38 *Letters* 53.7 pl 22 544
39 Erasmus probably refers to the Neoplatonic philosophers, especially Plotinus and Proclus, who had great influence on the Greek Fathers as well as on Ambrose and Augustine.

34

40 Titus 1:15
41 Song of Sol 6:8
42 Deut 21:11–13
43 Hos 1:2
44 Exod 12:34
45 For the allegorical interpretation cf Origen *Homiliae in Exodum* 7.5 pg 12 345–6.
46 2 Sam 6:6–7
47 Matt 7:13–14; Luke 13:24
48 Matt 5:18

35

49 Rom 7:14
50 Duns Scotus, Franciscan philosopher and theologian (c 1266–1308) known as the 'Subtle Doctor,' a title that Erasmus proceeds to ridicule in what follows
51 1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12; Rom 14:2. Cf *Paraclesis* lb v 140a.
52 John 6:63
53 2 Cor 3:6
54 Rom 7:14
55 1 Cor 2:13
56 Cf John 4:20.

36

57 Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.24 pg 11 703–6
58 1 Cor 14:2
59 Rom 14:3
60 Apoc 3:7
61 Ibidem 5:1
62 Matt 11:27
63 Augustine *De doctrina christiana* 2.28 pl 34 49; *Confessions* 7.9 pl 32 740
64 As that fitted out by Hephaestus for Achilles (*Iliad* 18.470ff) and for Aeneas (*Aeneid* 8.388ff)
65 1 Sam 17:36

37

66 Horace *Odes* 3.3.7–8
67 1 Sam 17:39

68 1 Cor 14:19. Cf 15 above.
69 The temptations of Christ by the devil, Matt 4:1–11
70 Wisd 5:18–21
71 Isa 59:17
72 2 Cor 10:4
73 Eph 6:13
74 2 Cor 6:7
75 Eph 6:14
76 Eph 6:16
77 Eph 6:17
78 Rom 8:35
79 Rom 8:37–9
80 1 Cor 4:13. Erasmus' text here reads *proiectamenta*. The Vulgate reading is *purgamenta* and that of the *Novum Testamentum, reiectamenta*.

38
81 The etymology of Jerusalem was erroneously given as 'vision of peace' as if it were from the word *shalom*. Cf Philo Judaeus 'On Dreams' 2.38.250.

The beginning of wisdom; on true and false wisdom

1 Pages 25–6
2 John 14:27
3 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 3.40; *De officiis* 3.106.
4 Wisd 7:30
5 A name that means 'worthlessness,' and is used in that sense in the Old Testament. Paul uses the name for Satan at 2 Cor 6:15, and he is so identified in rabbinical writings.
6 1 Cor 1:30
7 John 1:9; 1 John 2:8
8 Heb 1:3

39
9 1 Cor 1:23–4
10 1 Cor 3:18
11 1 Cor 1:19–20
12 Matt 15:14
13 Rom 16:19
14 Jer 4:22
15 Hesiod *Works and Days* 296–7
16 Ps 2:4
17 Wisd 4:18
18 Prov 1:26
19 Wisd of Sol 5:3

40
20 James 3:15

21 Phil 3:19
22 Cf Apoc 2:11, 20:6.
23 Wisd 7:11
24 Jth 9:16 (Vulg)
25 Supernatural aid bestowed on the virtuous man by the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, piety, fortitude, counsel, and fear of the Lord. Cf the phrase 'septiformis munere' in the third stanza of the hymn 'Veni creator spiritus' (*Analecta hymnica* 1 193).
26 Good affections of the soul enumerated by St Paul in Gal 5:22–3 as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control
27 James 1:5
28 Prov 2:4
29 *Adagia* I vi 95; Plato *Phaedrus* 229E
30 Juvenal *Satires* 11.27
31 Song of Sol 1:17. Erasmus' text follows the Septuagint and the Vulgate. In the original Hebrew the passage reads: 'If you do not know this,' namely, where the beloved is.
32 Cf 2 Cor 12:2.
33 1 Cor 4:3
34 1 Cor 2:15

41
35 The warriors who sprouted up from the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmus and immediately began to slay each other. Cf Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.101–30.
36 Josh 5:13
37 Persius *Satires* 3.30

On the outer and inner man

1 An unnamed critic of Erasmus objected to this passage, as we learn from Ep 843:690–9.
2 Terence *Phormio* 505; *Adagia* I iv 25, the meaning being that one can neither let go nor hold on
3 Ovid *Amores* 3.11.39
4 Horace *Odes* 1.16.13–16. This detail of the myth of Prometheus is peculiar to Horace.

42
5 Plato *Republic* 8.590D
6 The πρεσβύτεροι or elders of Plato's *Republic* 3.412C
7 *Timaeus* 69C. Plato says that they fashioned the body in imitation of the Demiurge.
8 Ibidem 69C–D
9 Ibidem 69D

43
10 Ibidem 42B2–3. 'Justly' is used here to translate the sense of δίκη in the *Republic*, the harmony of all the virtues in the soul.

11 Ibidem 70A
12 Ibidem 74E–75C
13 Ibidem 70A
14 Ibidem 70D–E
15 Ibidem 91B
16 Homer *Iliad* 8.247, 24.292

On the diversity of the passions

44

1 Impressions made through the senses upon the psyche, which are a stimulus to action. Since, according to Stoic doctrine, these impulses did not exist without an act of mental assent, the truly wise man should be free of them. Cf *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* ed Arnim (Stuttgart 1964) I 17–19.
2 Following the lead of Aristotle, they taught moderation of the passions (*μετριοπάθεια*) rather than absence of passion (*ἀπάθεια*).
3 64A
4 Plato *Phaedrus* 246A–B, 253C–254E. The soul is represented as a charioteer driving a car drawn by a pair of horses of different strain, one noble, the other lowly.

46

5 *Republic* 435C, 497D; *Hippias Major* 304E; *Cratylus* 384B; cf *Adagia* II i 12.
6 *Letters* 125.1 PL 22 1072
7 *Works and Days* 289–92

On the inner and outer man, and on the two parts of man according to the sacred Scriptures

47

1 Namely, Jews and Gentiles; Eph 2:14
2 Cf Matt 10:34–6; Luke 12:51.
3 Gal 5:16–17
4 Rom 8:13
5 1 Cor 9:27
6 Gal 5:18
7 Rom 8:15
8 Rom 7:23
9 Cf 2 Cor 4:16.
10 *Timaeus* 69D, with reference to the two mortal parts of the soul, the spiritual element or the *θυμός* and the appetitive part or *ἐπιθυμία*. Plato's localization of these parts of the soul in the body is referred to at 42–3 above.
11 1 Cor 15:45–7
12 1 Cor 15:48–50

48

13 Rom 7:24

14 Gal 6:8
15 A similar allegorical interpretation of the two brothers is found in Origen *De principiis* 2.9.7 PG 11 332.
16 Gen 25:22
17 Gen 27:23
18 Gen 25:26
19 Gen 27:11
20 Gen 25:29–34
21 Gen 27:4
22 Gen 32:25–33
23 Gen 25:23
24 Gen 27:40
25 Sir 42:14
26 Page 25 above
27 Gen 3:15

49

28 Gen 16:4–5. This passage is commented on by Origen *In Genesim homiliae* 8.10 PG 12 209BC.
29 Cf Jerome *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* Lagarde 67.
30 Prov 15:15
31 Gen 21:10. Cf Origen *In Genesim homiliae* 7.3 PG 12 200C–201A.
32 Gen 21:12
33 2 Cor 12:7
34 2 Cor 12:9
35 2 Cor 4:7
36 The many-headed monster that Hercules had to kill as his second labour. Each time one head was cut off, two others grew in its place.
37 Virgil *Georgics* 1.145

50

38 Ibidem 4.440–2
39 Ibidem 4.406–9
40 Ibidem 4.411–12
41 Gen 32:26
42 Gen 32:25
43 1 Kings 18:21
44 Ie those who are indecisive and untrustworthy. Cf *Adagia* III vi 84.
45 Gen 32:28
46 Gal 5:24
47 Ps 34:8 (Vulg 33:9)
48 Cf Jerome *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* Lagarde 13:21, 63:22, 74:15, 76:20, 'seeing God' or 'man seeing God.'
49 1 Kings 19:11–12
50 Gen 32:30
51 Exod 33:20

On the three parts of man: spirit, soul, and flesh

51

1 *Commentarius in epistolam ad Romanos* 1.5 PG 14 850–6 and *De principiis* 3.4 PG 11 320
2 1 Thess 5:23
3 Isa 26:9
4 Dan 3:86
5 1 Cor 6:16–17
6 Prov 2:16–19

52

7 Prov 6:24–6
8 Prov 9:13–18
9 *Pinguiore Minerva;* Horace *Satires* 2.2.3

53

10 1 Cor 6:16
11 Rom 14:3

Some general rules of true Christianity

54

1 Job 21:14

55

2 Luke 9:62
3 Cf Ps 19:5 (Vulg 18:6); 1 Cor 9:25.
4 Phil 3:13
5 Cf 1 Cor 9:24; 2 Tim 4:7–8; James 1:12.

The first rule, against the evil of ignorance

1 1 Tim 4:7
2 James 2:19

56

3 Luke 17:5
4 Matt 19:29

Second rule

1 Terence *Phormio* 964
2 Matt 11:12
3 Exod 16:3

4 Cf Gen 19:26. The Vulgate has *statua salis* and the Septuagint *στήλη ἁλός*. Philo *De ebrietate* 164 says she was turned into stone.
5 Jer 51:6
6 Luke 12:20

57
7 2 Peter 5:7
8 Ps 55:22 (Vulg 54:23)
9 Ps 23 (Vulg 22):1–3
10 Matt 6:24
11 2 Cor 6:15
12 1 Kings 18:21
13 Rev 3:16
14 Matt 7:13–14
15 Usually identified with Nemesis, goddess of retribution; *Adagia* II vi 38
16 Gal 6:14
17 Matt 10:38

58
18 Col 2:12
19 Horace *Odes* 2.14.12

Third rule

1 Virgil *Aeneid* 6.273–89
2 Horace *Epistles* 1.1.46

59
3 Plautus *Cistellaria* 69
4 Virgil *Aeneid* 6.595–602; Homer *Odyssey* 11.576–600. All are classic examples of terrible punishment meted out in the pagan underworld.
5 Wisd 5:7
6 Matt 11:29–30

60
7 Gal 6:7. Erasmus substitutes 'Christ' for 'God.'
8 Matt 6:19
9 Matt 6:33; Luke 12:31
10 1 Kings 8:20
11 Rom 8:28

Fourth rule

61
1 *Adagia* I x 30. Similar christocentric doctrine is expressed in Colet 138: 'Christus auctor et exemplar ideaque Christianae religionis / Christ the author, exemplar, and archetype of the Christian religion.'

2 Matt 6:22; Luke 11:34

3 1 Thess 5:10

4 Discussed in the life of the Cynic philosopher Zeno in Diogenes Laertius 7.101–7. Jerome denies the third middle or neutral category in *Letters* 112.16 PL 22 926.

62

5 Cf Augustine *De doctrina christiana* 1.33.36 PL 34 33–4.

6 Luke 16:9. 'Mammon' is a Semitic word for 'riches.'

7 Diogenes Laertius 6.87; Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.13; Jerome *Letters* 58.2 PL 22 580

63

8 Pandora's box. Cf Hesiod *Works and Days* 94–6. It was Erasmus, referring to the myth in *Adagia* I iii 34 (CWE 31 263), who first changed the Greek word *πίθος*, 'a huge storing jar,' to *πύξις*, 'box,' and so it remained in most modern languages. Cf Dora and Erwin Panofsky *Pandora's Box* (New York 1956) 15–18.

9 1 Cor 7:29, 31

10 1 Cor 1:21

11 1 Cor 1:25

12 Erasmus himself was not very adept at fasting, as he confesses to Arnold Bostius, a Carmelite of Ghent, in Ep 75:12. For his attacks on fasting see the *Epistola de esu carnium* ASD IX-1 1–50.

13 This paragraph was put on the *Index expurgatorius* (Antwerp 1571).

14 According to popular belief anyone who looked upon his image would not suffer harm that day. For that reason large statues or frescoes of St Christopher stood near the church door. The huge statue of the saint that stood at the entrance to the nave of Notre Dame in Paris is mentioned in the colloquy *Peregrinatio religionis ergo* ASD I-3 484. Cf *Moria* LB IV 443B, 450D / CWE 27 114, 118.

15 Venerated in France and Italy from the early fifteenth century; he was especially invoked against pestilence.

16 Patroness of those in danger of dying without the sacraments, especially those going into battle

64

17 Martyr in Palestine probably during the reign of Diocletian, patron saint of England and various other countries

18 It is recounted that St Apollonia was seized by the heathen populace of Alexandria, who knocked out all her teeth. She is often represented with a golden tooth suspended from her necklace.

19 Job 4:8. God allowed Satan to afflict Job's body with loathsome sores.

20 An Irish missionary to the Frisians martyred by the Norsemen c 856

21 Tithes were offered to him on the *Ara maxima* in the cattle market at Rome.

22 An expiatory offering, as in the famous episode in Plato *Phaedo* 118A

23 The first settlers of Lesbos placated Poseidon with the offering of a bull, and the people of Corcyra were accustomed to offer a bronze bull to Poseidon at Delphi.

24 1 Tim 6:5
25 Rom 16:18
26 Rom 14:8

65
27 Phil 1:23
28 1 Cor 12:31

Fifth rule

1 Pages 41–2 above
2 Colet 107, following Pico *Heptaplus* (ed Eugenio Garin, Florence 1942, 184), divides the intelligible into the divine and the angelic.

66
3 2 Cor 4:6
4 Mal 4:2
5 Cf Jerome *Commentarius in epistolam ad Ephesios* 5.8 PL 26 (1884) 556.
6 *Adagia* I ii 21 CWE 31 167
7 Plato *Phaedo* 64A–68B, 80D–81A
8 Matt 10:38, 16:24
9 2 Tim 2:11
10 Ps 44 (Vulg 43):22

67
11 Col 3:1–2
12 Matt 25:41
13 Plato *Symposium* 215B–217A. The Sileni of Alcibiades are the subject of a long commentary in *Adagia* III iii 1.

68
14 Gen 2:7–21, 3:1–8, 22–4. The same examples are used by Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.7 PG 11 667.
15 Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.82–8; Phaedrus 4.14; Plato *Protagoras* 320D–322A
16 Hesiod *Works and Days* 280ff
17 Literally 'against Minerva's will'; cf *Adagia* I i 42 CWE 31 91.
18 Homer *Odyssey* 10.233–9
19 *Odyssey* 11.582–92
20 *Odyssey* 11.593–600
21 Apollodorus *Library* 1.185–237
22 Cf Gen 25:22.
23 Cf Gen 25:29–34.
24 Cf Gen 27:1–29.
25 Cf 1 Sam 17:49.
26 Cf Judg 16:19.
27 Livy portrayed the heroes of republican Rome as paragons of virtue for the edification of the readers of *Ab urbe condita*.

28 These same examples occur in *Adagia* III iii 1 and probably derive from Augustine *De doctrina christiana* 3.20.30–1 PL 34 73, 77.

69

29 Erasmus here rejects the identification of the author of this treatise with Dionysius the Areopagite, the convert of St Paul, although he had earlier accepted it. Cf *Antibarbari* CWE 23 107:24n. Abelard had already doubted this authorship, but it was Lorenzo Valla who definitively refuted it; see *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* in *Opera omnia* (Basel 1540; repr Turin 1962) I f 582.
30 Together with Clement of Alexandria the chief proponent of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Cf Ep 181:47–8.
31 For Erasmus' attacks on the arid discussions of the scholastic theologians, cf *Moria* LB IV 465C–470D / CWE 27 126–30 and the *Ratio verae theologiae* LB V 82.
32 *De civitate Dei* 8.5 PL 41 229
33 2 Cor 3:6
34 Ex 34:33. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai he veiled the divine splendour of his countenance, but when he went in to speak before the Lord, he removed the veil. Paul interprets the passage allegorically at 2 Cor 3:13–16.
35 1 Cor 13:12
36 John 6:63
37 Rom 8:6; 2 Cor 3:6

70

38 Isa 40:6–8
39 The fruits of the Spirit, enumerated in Gal 5:22–3. Cf 40 n26 above.
40 Luke 14:5
41 John 9:1–41
42 Luke 6:1–4
43 Matt 15:20; Mark 7:5. Cf *Adagia* I ix 55.
44 Matt 9:10–13; Luke 5:29–32
45 Luke 18:10–14
46 Matt 9:14–16; Luke 5:33–9
47 Matt 12:46–50; Luke 8:19–21
48 Matt 3:9; John 8:33
49 Matt 5:23
50 Matt 6:5
51 Matt 23:5. These were two small leather pouches containing pieces of parchment inscribed with passages from *Deuteronomy* and *Exodus*, worn by Jews during morning prayer on days other than the Sabbath and holy days as a reminder of their obligation to keep the law.
52 John 4:21–4
53 John 2:1–10
54 1 Cor 27:9
55 John 6:63

71

56 1 Cor 6:15–17

57 Erasmus expresses his disapproval of those who attend mass for superstitious reasons in the *Confabulatio pia* (Thompson *Colloquies* 36–7).
58 *Adagia* I iii 12 CWE 31 245
59 Rom 6:4
60 Similar sentiments are expressed in the *Moria* LB IV 454A / CWE 27 120.

72
61 Rom 12:21
62 Cf *Funus* (Thompson *Colloquies* 368).
63 Cf Ep 396:73–6: 'The slippers of the saints and their drivel-stained napkins we put to our lips, and the books they wrote, the most sacred and most powerful relics of those holy men, we leave to lie neglected.'
64 Most renowned painter of antiquity. His lifelike portrait of Alexander the Great was especially admired.
65 John 1:1, 18

73
66 Erasmus mentions this relic also in Ep 373:192–6. It was first exposed to public veneration in a collegiate church of Lirey in France around 1350, and subsequently came into the possession of the house of Savoy in Chambéry in 1453.
67 Cf Augustine *Sermones* 215 PL 38 1074.
68 Mark 16:14
69 John 16:7
70 2 Cor 5:16
71 Cf 1 Cor 12:31.
72 *Adagia* II i 30

74
73 1 Cor 3:1; Eph 4:13
74 The passage 'But to worship Christ' to the end of this section was placed on the *Index expurgatorius* (Antwerp 1571).
75 Gal 2:14–16
76 Matt 5:13
77 St Paul the Hermit, often known as the first hermit, lived in the Egyptian desert until his death in 342, nourished only by a single palm tree and a clear spring. St Antony, patriarch of all monks, established a community of monks in the Fayum in Egypt.
78 Terence *Adelphi* 98

75
79 Rom 8:4
80 Gal 5:22–3
81 Luke 18:11
82 Rom 8:1–8. Erasmus' text at 8:3 differs from the Vulgate and from the Greek in the syntax of the relative pronoun, *quae* for *in quo*.

76
83 Cf *Antibarbari* CWE 23 51.
84 Col 2:18–19. In the phrase 'things he has not seen' Erasmus adopts the Vulgate

variant, which contains the negative, against the reading of Sinaiticus D, whereas in the appositive, 'that is, Christ,' he follows Sinaiticus D rather than the Vulgate.
85 Col 2:20
86 Col 3:1–2
87 Col 3:5
88 Col 3:8
89 Col 3:9–10
90 Cf 1 Cor 15:47.
91 Cf Phil 3:20.

77
92 Col 3:14–15
93 Gal 5:19–21. Erasmus follows the Vulgate reading *homicidia*, which is not in the Greek.
94 Gal 5:25. *Et* ('also') of the Vulgate is omitted.
95 Gal 5:26
96 Luke 6:44

78
97 21.4.1
98 Gal 5:1
99 Gal 3:24–6
100 Erasmus uses the Vulgate reading *est*; the Greek has the second person singular εἶ.
101 Gal 4:3–7
102 Gal 5:13–15
103 Rom 8:15. The phrase 'of God' is neither in the Vulgate nor in the Greek.
104 1 Tim 4:7–8
105 2 Cor 3:17

79
106 Deut 6:5
107 John 13:34–5, 15:12
108 The word *symmystes* was used of initiates in pagan religions, but was also applied to the Christian mysteries by Origen and Jerome.
109 1 John 4:7, 11
110 1 Cor 13:1–2
111 1 Thess 5:11
112 1 Cor 12:26
113 2 Tim 2:24
114 1 Thess 5:14
115 Cf Augustine *Regula ad servos Dei* PL 32 1377–84. Augustine's rule was the basis of many rules of religious orders, especially after its official adaptation by the united Augustinian order in 1256. On the complicated issues relating to this document, see George Lawless OSA *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford 1987).

80

116 In the paraphrase on this Epistle Erasmus interprets Paul's phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου to mean the servile rituals that have to do with matters such as choice of food and difference of dress (LB VII 956E).
117 1 Tim 1:8
118 Cf Rom 4:1–3.
119 The Jewish festival held at the beginning of the lunar month, marked by the sacrifice of animals
120 Isa 1:11–15
121 Isa 58:1

81

122 Isa 58:2–5
123 Isa 1:16
124 Isa 11:13
125 Matt 25:1–12
126 Matt 7:21
127 Isa 1:17
128 Isa 58:6–7
129 1 Cor 8:11
130 Luke 11:42; Matt 23:23
131 John 4:24
132 *Disticha Catonis* 1.1 (*Fragmenta poetarum romanorum* ed Baehrens, Leipzig 1927, 3.16); also Erasmus, *Catonis Disticha moralia, latine et graece, cum scholiis* (Lyons 1536) 11
133 *Adagia* I ii 21

82

134 Ps 51:17 (Vulg 50:19)
135 Isa 1:11; Heb 9:12
136 Erasmus elaborates on this theme in πτωχοπλούσιοι *sive Franciscani* (Thompson *Colloquies* 204–17).
137 Ps 51:7 (Vulg 50:9)
138 Matt 15:11
139 Luke 15:16
140 Ezek 8:8
141 Ps 62:4 (Vulg 61:5)
142 Jer 13:17
143 Luke 8:10; Matt 13:14
144 Isa 6:9; Jer 5:21
145 Ps 45:10–14 (Vulg 44:11–15)

83

146 Erasmus' doctrine on confession is contained in his *Exomologesis sive modus confitendi* LB V 146–70.
147 Papal indulgences and dispensations
148 Isa 5:20
149 Luke 7:47

150 Ezek 37:4
151 *Adagia* I iii 92 CWE 31 311. In the *Moria* a personified *Philautia*, sister of *Kolakia* (Flattery) is an attendant of Folly (LB IV 411A / CWE 27 89).
152 Isa 59:4
153 Rom 10:2
154 Rom 10:4
155 John 4:24
156 1 John 4:8
157 Isa 5:13

84
158 Cf Gal 4:3.
159 Cf John 6:9–13.
160 Cf Ex 17:6.
161 John 7:38
162 *Phaedrus* 251AB
163 Gen 28:12
164 James 4:8
165 1 Tim 6:16. Cf Pseudo-Dionysius *De nominibus divinis* 3 PG 3 872A and *Ecclesiastes* LB V 1088C–D.
166 Cf Zech 2:13.

Sixth rule

1 Literally, 'a nail's breadth'; cf *Adagia* I v 6 CWE 31 390.
2 484CD, 506A, 519C

85
3 Auxiliaries of the rulers; *Republic* 414B, 463B
4 1.8.4
5 *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13.3 (1144b7), 7.2.1–2 (1145b21)
6 Plato *Protagoras* 352C, 357D–E
7 Cicero *De oratore* 3.213, *Brutus* 37.142, *Orator* 17–56; Quintilian 11.3
8 *Protagoras* 352C, 357D–E
9 *Protagoras* 355A–357B

86
10 *Republic* 541A–B. Cf *Moria* LB IV 451D / CWE 27 119.
11 Usually referred to as the Lesbian rule. *Adagia* I v 93 CWE 31 465
12 Luke 12:32
13 Matt 7:4
14 James 2:14
15 Horace *Epistles* 1.6.36–7
16 *Satires* 2.5.8
17 *Epistles* 1.1.53

87
18 During religious processions in ancient Greece abusive ribaldry was common,

such as that allowed to women at the Eleusinian mysteries, as they were taken in wagons to the celebrations. Cf *Adagia* I vii 73.

19 Bellerophon in Euripides' *Danae* (Augustus Nauck *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta*, Leipzig 1899, frag 324), cited in Latin by Seneca *Epistulae morales* 115.14–15. Cf *Adagia* I iii 87 CWE 31 307.

20 Phocion (c 402–318 BC) refused to accept the reward sent by Alexander the Great after a peace embassy, requesting instead the release of the Greek prisoners (Plutarch *Phocion* 18).

21 Gaius Fabricius Luscinus, Roman general who rejected alike the bribes of King Pyrrhus in the negotiations for the exchange of prisoners and the proffered aid of would-be poisoners of Pyrrhus (Plutarch *Pyrrhus* 20; Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 3.23.56)

22 After the sack of Rome by the Gauls in 389 BC, Marcus Furius Camillus rallied the citizens to drive out the invaders (Livy 3.32.46).

23 Lucius Junius Brutus, traditional founder of the Roman republic, said to have sentenced to death two of his sons and witnessed their execution when they were convicted of plotting to restore Tarquinius to the throne (Livy 2.3–5)

24 Pythagoras (fl 530BC) believed the soul could escape the confinement of the body by the cultivation of an Apolline purity. The religious society that he founded in southern Italy followed a strict discipline of purity.

25 Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis, great-grandson of Cato the Elder, noted for his uncompromising integrity as Roman tribune, ruler of Cyprus, and governor of Utica. He committed suicide rather than surrender to Caesar (Sallust *Catilina* 54).

26 4.2, 6.15, 9.1

27 *Adagia* I v 41 CWE 31 421

28 *Adagia* I iv 26 CWE 31 338

88

29 Luke 16:8

30 Literally 'Democritean,' after the cynical philosopher Democritus (c 460–c 370). Cf Juvenal *Satires* 10.33–4, 47–53; Horace *Epistles* 2.1.194.

31 Rom 11:17

32 Cf 1 Cor 6:17, 12:13.

33 Cf 1 John 3:1.

34 Ps 84:10 (Vulg 83:11)

35 Cf 1 Cor 1:27–8.

36 Cf 1 Cor 15:47.

37 Cf Rom 12:5.

38 Cf Gen 13:2; 14:14–16.

39 John 8:44

40 Rom 9:6. Neither the Vulgate nor the Greek text contains the phrase 'by circumcision.'

41 Matt 7:21, 12:50; Luke 8:21

42 John 14:6

43 Cf Rom 8:16–17.

89

44 Cf Gal 6:14, 17.

45 Cf Matt 13:46.
46 Cf Sir 1:26; Prov 8:11.
47 Cf Apoc 3:18.
48 Cf Matt 13:7.
49 Cf Matt 7:14.
50 Cf Matt 6:33; Luke 12:31.
51 Cf Rom 13:14.
52 Cf 1 Cor 8:6.
53 *Adagia* I vii 46. When Ajax in his madness slaughtered a flock of sheep, thinking they were the enemy, he laughed in derision of himself.
54 The citizens of Miletus were corrupted through their contacts with the people of Sybaris. Cf *Adagia* I ix 49 and II ii 65.
55 Inhabitants of the city of Sybaris, located on the Gulf of Tarentum, notorious for their luxurious living
56 Erasmus' text has *Asoti*, as if they were another group of people, whereas the Greek word means simply 'profligate.' Cf Cicero *De finibus* 2.8.23 and *De natura deorum* 3.31.77.
57 Regarded here as devotees of sensual pleasure according to the popular misconception. For Erasmus' views on 'Christian Epicureanism' see *Epicureus* (Thompson *Colloquies* 538–51).

90

58 The Pythagoreans were vegetarians. The eating of meat and of beans was prohibited. Horace *Satires* 2.6.63; Cicero *De divinatione* 2.58.119
59 Hos 4:14
60 Ps 89:32–3 (Vulg 88:33–4)
61 2 Cor 5:17

91

62 John Chrysostom *Expositio in Psalmos* 139.1 PG 55 420; Plato *Gorgias* 508E
63 Phil 4:13
64 Matt 5:43–4; 1 Thess 5:15

92

65 Cf John 8:44.
66 Luke 12:20
67 The story of Jason; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.149–51
68 *Fables* 233
69 Terence *Adelphi* 216
70 The Dacians inhabited the area that corresponds to modern Romania, the Scythians the region north of the Black Sea.

93

71 Isa 5:20
72 *Sermones* 175 (PL 38 945)
73 Cf Rom 12:2. The phrases in parentheses were added by Erasmus.
74 John 12:36; Eph 5:8
75 Matt 8:22; Luke 9:60

76 Matt 15:14
77 Cf Isa 59:10.
78 *Adagia* I ix 62. The Euripus, the channel between Boeotia and Euboea, was used proverbially to signify violent and sudden change.
79 Members of the priestly caste among the Hindus. Their way of life is described in Philostratus' account of the life of the mystic Apollonius of Tyana (*Vita Apollonii* 3.15).
80 The Cynics lived lives of extreme simplicity and individualism, flouting all civilized conventions.
81 The Stoics believed in living in harmony with nature and that virtue was the only good and lack of virtue the only evil.

Beliefs worthy of a Christian

1 2 Cor 5:15; Phil 2:4; cf Cicero *De officiis* 1.7.22.
2 Rom 5:10

94
3 Rom 12:15
4 Catullus 93.2
5 Rom 8:17
6 Eph 4:4–6
7 A rhetorical term referring to the logical surroundings or 'adjuncts' of an action, such as time, place, manner, cause, and occasion. Cf Cicero *De inventione* 1.26.38 and *De conscribendis epistolis* CWE 25 119.
8 Gal 3:28
9 Eph 4:25

95
10 1 Cor 11:3
11 *Adagia* I ii 21 CWE 31 167
12 A reformed branch of Franciscan Conventuals in northern France and Belgium who followed the primitive rule of St Clare, which imposed absolute poverty and perpetual fasting
13 A mendicant order established on Mount Carmel in Palestine in the twelfth century, particularly devoted to the Blessed Virgin
14 Erasmus uses the name Jacobite, synonymous with Jacobin, originally used of French members of the order after the church of St Jacques in Paris, where their convent was situated.

96
15 1 Cor 12:12–25, 27
16 Rom 12:4–6
17 Eph 4:15–16
18 Gal 6:2
19 Eph 4:25

97

20 Matt 5:39–41, 44–5
21 Matt 5:46
22 Rom 12:14, 17–21

98

23 Matt 20:26–8
24 Luke 12:48

99

25 *Republic* 347C, 520D–E. Erasmus refers to this passage also in the *Institutio principis christiani* LB IV 570E / CWE 27 222.

100

26 Cf *Institutio principis christiani* LB IV 600C–601B / CWE 27 271–3.
27 The combined epithet *optimus maximus* was used of emperors and then of God.

101

28 John 18:36
29 Matt 20:25
30 Matt 20:26
31 Erasmus ridicules this term in the *Moria* LB IV 470D / CWE 27 130.
32 Matt 23:8
33 Phil 3:18
34 John 1:9
35 John 5:19
36 Rom 13:14
37 John 15:19
38 2 Cor 2:17, 4:2
39 Rom 13:1
40 Juvenal *Satires* 4.70

102

41 Luke 16:2
42 Matt 10:10; Luke 3:11
43 St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa theologiae* 2-2.26.4
44 Erasmus uses this name for the fictitious interlocutor to signify one who is proverbially rich.
45 2 Sam 11
46 Gen 13:2
47 1 Kings 11
48 Phil 3:19
49 Gen 9:20
50 Gen 19:30
51 2 Sam 12:13
52 Luke 7:37–8
53 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; Acts 26:4–11
54 Matt 26:69–75

55 According to tradition St Paul was beheaded on the road to Ostia.
56 According to tradition St Peter was crucified at Rome under Nero in the year 65 AD.

103

57 Gen 22:1–12
58 Gen 19:31–6
59 Gen 1:22
60 1 Tim 1:13
61 Terence *Eunuchus* 762
62 Matt 9:9; Luke 5:27–8
63 Augustine was faithful to his first mistress, but at the insistence of his mother, St Monica, he put her away in order to be married. Since his future bride was not of legal age, he took another mistress in the mean time (*Confessions* 6.15.25 PL 32 731D–732A).

104

64 1 Cor 1:21
65 Diogenes, founder of this sect, was given the name *ὁ κύων*, 'the dog,' because of his shameless actions in defiance of conventional decency and good manners.
66 1 Cor 9:22

The seventh rule

105

1 12.11.30
2 *Adagia* I ii 48 CWE 31 190
3 Plato *Phaedo* 82A–B
4 2 Thess 1:11

Eighth rule

106

1 Heb 12:6
2 2 Cor 12:2–7
3 1 Cor 10:13

Ninth rule

1 1 Peter 5:8. This text is used daily in the church service of Compline.
2 Gen 3:15
3 Ps 137 (Vulg 136):9. Quoted by Pico in his Tenth Rule
4 1 Cor 10:4. Cf Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 136.21 PL 37 1773–4.

Tenth rule

1 As did Christ when tempted by the devil, Matt 4:3–10
2 Page 30 above

Eleventh rule

1 Ps 91 (Vulg 90):5–6

107
2 Phil 4:13
3 John 16:33
4 Cf Pico, Seventh Rule.
5 1 Cor 4:7

Twelfth rule

1 Cf Pico, Seventh Rule.
2 It was because of Juno's hatred that Hercules had to serve Eurystheus and perform the twelve labours imposed upon him; cf Virgil *Aeneid* 8.292.

Thirteenth rule

1 Much of this is indebted to Pico's Eighth Rule.

108
2 *Contra Celsum* 8.44 PG 11 1581
3 Isa 21:8; Hab 2:1

Fourteenth rule

1 *Works and Days* 361; *Adagia* I iii 31 CWE 31 260

Fifteenth rule

1 The first part of this section is found also in Pico's Eleventh Rule.

Sixteenth rule

109
1 Quoted in Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 17.21.31. Cf *Adagia* I x 40.

Seventeenth rule

110

1 This is reminiscent of the practice known as the Stations of the Cross, developed by the Franciscans in the Middle Ages.
2 1 Cor 3:2
3 Rom 8:9
4 This section corresponds closely to Pico's Fourth Rule.
5 Matt 27:34; Luke 23:26

111

6 Isa 53:7
7 2 Cor 8:9
8 Matt 8:20; Luke 9:58

Eighteenth rule

1 Pico's Eighth Rule is entitled *Hominis dignitas et natura.*
2 1 Cor 6:20
3 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19

Nineteenth rule

112

1 John 15:14
2 Gal 4:7
3 John 8:34

Twentieth rule

1 Corresponds to Pico's Seventh Weapon, *Aeternum praemium: aeterna poena*
2 Matt 19:29
3 1 Cor 2:9

113

4 Isa 66:24. The passage from 'In the mean time' to 'habit of sinning' was placed on the *Index expurgatorius* (Antwerp 1571) for its implied denial of hell fire. Cf the letter to Nöel Béda (Allen Ep 1581) and Origen *De principiis* 2.10.45 PG 11 236C–238B.
5 Luke 16:19

Twenty second rule

1 Virgil *Aeneid* 6.126, 128

2 *Fables* 45

Remedies against certain special vices, and first against lust

1 Erasmus here begins a discussion of the seven deadly sins but breaks off after treating only four of them: lust, avarice, ambition, and anger.

114

2 Juvenal *Satires* 6.181
3 1 Cor 6:18–20; Heb 13:12
4 *Adagia* I ix 46
5 Pico, Twelfth Weapon
6 Cf Ambrose *De virginibus* 8.51 PL 16 202D.

115

7 *Adagia* II iii 48
8 Matt 25:41
9 Heb 6:6
10 Rule nineteen, 112 above

116

11 *Symposium* 180C–187E
12 Cf Jerome *Commentarius in evangelium Matthaei* 3.18 PL 26 (1884) 135A.
13 Prov 24:12
14 Cf *Adolescentis et scorti* (Thompson *Colloquies* 155).
15 Member of the Argonaut expedition endowed with extraordinary keen-sightedness (*Adagia* II i 54)

117

16 1 Cor 6:15–17
17 Heb 13:4
18 Eph 5:22–5
19 1 Kings 1:1–4. Erasmus gives an allegorical interpretation of Abisag the Shunammite. She was given to King David in his old age to revive his diminished physical powers, but he remained impotent.
20 Sir 3:26

Against the promptings of avarice

118

1 Cf Plato *Alcibiades* 134B; Aristotle *Politics* 1323a–b.
2 Matt 6:26–34; Luke 12:27–9
3 Luke 10:4
4 Matt 6:33; Luke 12:31

119

5 The wise counsellor of the *Iliad*. Homer describes him as being over sixty years

old (*Iliad* 1.247–52), while Ovid says he was over two hundred years old (*Metamorphoses* 12.187–8).

6 *Discourses* 1.1.7, 3.24.3

120

7 Matt 13:22

8 Matt 19:24; Luke 18:25

9 *Letters* 120 PL 22 984; cf *Adagia* I ix 47.

10 Eph 5:5

11 Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13

12 Luke 12:20

121

13 Luke 6:24

Against ambition

1 2 Cor 10:18

2 Cf 61–2 above.

122

3 Luke 14:11

4 John 6:15

5 Matt 21:7; Luke 19:29–35; John 12:14–15

6 Matt 27:28; John 19:2

7 Acts 3:13

8 Gal 6:14

Against haughtiness and arrogance of mind

1 James 1:17

2 Isa 40:4

3 2 Peter 2:4

123

4 Phil 3:13

5 As the peacock was about to take flight, it looked down at its ugly feet and remained mournfully on the ground (Epiphanius *Physiologus* PG 43 527).

6 *Adagia* II iii 48. Cf 115 n7 above.

Against anger and the desire for revenge

1 Juvenal treats the combined vices of anger and revenge in *Satires* 13.180–92.

124

2 Cf 91 n62 above.

3 Matt 6:12–14, 18:33–5; Mark 11:25–6
4 At Compostela in Spain
5 Matt 5:24

125
6 Rom 5:10
7 Luke 23:34
8 Cf Horace *Epistles* 1.2.62: 'ira furor brevis est.'

126
9 Rom 12:21

127
10 Cf Matt 23:15.
11 This same phrase is found at Ep 164:25, and writing to his old friend Nicolaas Werner at the monastery of Steyn in September 1502 Erasmus gave expression to a similar statement: 'stupid and uneducated people who deem the sum of holiness to consist in a monkish cowl and a long face' (Ep 171:9–11).
12 Erasmus often reverts to this concept, by which he means religious formalism or legalism, external observance of ceremonial divorced from true religious feeling. The *Paraphrases on Romans and Galatians* (CWE 42) allude frequently to this abuse. Cf Ep 541:149n.
13 Horace *Ars poetica* 269

ON DISDAINING THE WORLD / *DE CONTEMPTU MUNDI*

Introductory note

130
1 Louvain: Martens 1521. For the Latin text see ASD V-1 40–86, ed and comm S. Dresden, to whose notes I am indebted, especially for the identification of classical sources.
2 Cf 134 below.
3 Cf 134 below.
4 134 below. Similar comments are found in Erasmus' catalogue of his works (Allen I 18:16–19).
5 See 134 below. J.-B. Pineau *Erasme: Sa pensée réligieuse* (Paris 1924) 33 n5 claims that 'Theodoricus' was Cornelis Gerard of Gouda and 'Jodocus' his relative Willem Hermans, a colleague of Erasmus'.
6 *De contemptu mundi* (text in PL 50 711–26); this source has been overlooked in Dresden's commentary. For a closer analysis of parallels see E. Rummel 'Quoting Poetry instead of Scripture: Erasmus and Eucherius on *contemptus mundi*' BHR 45 (1983) 503–9.
7 For lists of parallels see below ch3 n2 n4 n17, ch4 n4, ch5 n10 etc. Additional parallels with patristic sources are cited in the notes, but in many cases the ideas expressed are part of a common literary heritage, so that similarities are not necessarily proof of interdependence.

8 Cf Ep 296:15–18.

9 Ep 447:341–7; similarly *Compendium vitae* CWE 4 407:91–6

131

10 See below ch12 n2 n5 n9 n16.

11 Cf P. Mestwerdt *Die Anfänge des Erasmus* (Leipzig 1917) 216 n1: 'That this is a later addition is generally recognized'; A. Hyma *The Youth of Erasmus* (Ann Arbor 1930) 168: 'It was unquestionably added by Erasmus at the time the treatise was published by him'; W.J. Hirten in his introduction to Paynell's translation of *De contemptu mundi* (Gainesville 1967) xiv: 'Probably about the same time (1521) Erasmus made a ... significant change in the work by inserting a new chapter, the twelfth'; S. Dresden in his introduction to the text 34: 'the ideas and the style ... induce me to accept a later date, compared to the rest of the epistle.' On the other hand, E.V. Telle 148 and R.H. Bainton *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York 1969) 16 recognize a certain continuity of thought.

12 Cf M. Haverals 'Une première redaction du "De contemptu mundi" d'Erasme dans un manuscrit de Zwolle' *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 30 (1981) 4–54.

13 See 134 below. Haverals lists the corrections 45–51. The revisions, though affecting more than 'a word here and there,' are for the most part confined to corrections of mistakes and small stylistic changes, such as *pectore nostro non metum exerueris / pectori nostro metum non exemeris; mori cogitare / mortem cogitare; aniles / seniles; singularissimus / praecipuus; in tabernam / in propinam aut oenopolium.*

14 Composed in the years 1501/2 (cf Ep 164 introduction), first published in 1503 (Antwerp: Martens), and slightly revised for publication in 1518 (Basel: Froben)

15 First published in 1511 (Paris: Gilles de Gourmont), with significant revisions and additions in 1514 and 1516

133

16 Erasmus mentions it in his catalogue of 1523 (Allen I 37:6), noting that a mutilated version of it was still among his papers.

17 For evidence of this debate and its significance for Erasmus see Ep 49 to Hendrick van Bergen (1496), especially lines 106–11.

18 *De contemptu mundi* PL 50 726B

19 This tactic reaches its climax in chapter 11, which is based on the teachings of Epicurus, the most notorious of pagan philosophers. To interpret Epicurean ideals in a Christian sense was, however, not a new approach; for the patristic and medieval tradition see R. Bultot; for the Renaissance approach see Timmermans.

20 No fewer than ten editions appeared in the four years following the first publication, with minor revisions and corrections done in 1523.

Dedicatory letter

134

1 This dedicatory letter is Ep 1194.

2 Erasmus refers to the progress made by humanistic learning and writing in his own lifetime, which had prompted him earlier to hail the arrival of a new Golden Age (cf Epp 541:13, 964:85n). References to the great promise of the age have by the time of this letter become rather rare (cf Epp 1223:19–20, 1237:15–19), while pessimistic assessments dominate; cf for instance Epp 1205:32–5, 1239:14–22.

3 Cf *Adagia* II viii 59.

4 Cf translator's note above 130 and n5.

5 Cf translator's note above 131–3.

Theodoricus of Haarlem to his nephew

135

1 *Adagia* I ii 11: *Ululas Athenas*

2 *Adagia* I vii 57: *In silvam ligna ferre*

3 Reminiscent of Jerome *Letters* 14.1 PL 22 347–8: 'Was I to keep silent ... was I to have pleaded with more urgency?' The letter, like Erasmus' treatise, deals with the subject of *contemptus mundi.* It may have served as one of the models for Erasmus' composition. For other parallels with Jerome's Ep 14 see below n11 n19 n22, ch 2 n1, ch 11 n24, ch 12 n7 n16.

4 *Cedat amori pudor;* cf Ovid *Amores* 3.10.29: *victus amore pudor* 'modesty vanquished by love.'

136

5 Cf Eucherius *De contemptu mundi* PL 50 711D: *geminum ... vinculum,* 'double chain.' Eucherius' treatise served as a model for Erasmus'; cf introduction n6. For further parallels see below n6, ch 2 n7, ch 3 n2 n7 n20, ch 4 n2, ch 5 n4 n10 n15 n22, ch 6 n1 n3 n5, ch 7 n1 n2.

6 Quoting Eucherius 711D almost verbatim

7 *Mundi strepitus.* For similar catchphrases in monastic literature, see eg Thomas à Kempis *Sermo ad fratres* 9.4, *De solitudine* 23; Hildebert of Lavardin *Sermones de sanctis* 87 PL 171 750B. The term is also used by Erasmus in the *Enchiridion* LB V 62B.

8 *Adagia* II v 16: *Secundis ventis*

9 The comparison between world and sea is a commonplace in patristic literature; for examples see Rahner 239–72. Specific symbols used by Erasmus in the following passage include the safe 'harbour,' the treacherous 'calm,' the 'shipwreck' and escape on a 'narrow plank,' the temptations of the 'Sirens,' and 'Ulysses tied to the mast.'

10 Ovid *Heroides* 1.11

11 Cf Jerome *Letters* 14.6 PL 22 350: 'as if I had been shipwrecked not long ago and been thrown ashore.'

12 Cf Cyprian *De singularitate clericorum* 6 PL 4 913C–D: 'The kind of confidence that exposes life to danger ... is wrong.'

13 Similar parallels are employed by Seneca *Epistulae morales* 14.8 and Galen *Exhortatio* 2.3, of which Erasmus published a translation in 1525.

137

14 Literally 'raging Syrtes.' The Syrtes are usually associated with dangerous sandbanks on the Lybian shore. The metaphor Syrtes/vices is used by Horace *Odes* 1.22.5 and Jerome *Ad monachos* 1 PL 30 (1865) 322D.

15 The Sirens lured unwary sailors to their death. Cf Ulysses' encounter with them in Homer *Odyssey* 12.39ff. The metaphor Sirens/temptations is a literary commonplace in Christian literature. Cf Rahner 249–60; on the comparison Ulysses/Christian voyager see ibidem 260–71.

16 Cf *Adagia* III x 19: *Fuga tutior.*

17 Cf 2 Sam 12:13: 'I have sinned against the Lord'; also Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 697A. For further parallels with this poem see ch 3 n19 n26, ch 4 n10 n14, ch 5 n6 n10 n20, ch 6 n6 n9 n21, ch 12 n16.

18 Cf n15 above.

19 The dangers of Charybdis' whirlpool are proverbial; cf *Adagia* I v 4. The parallel is also employed by Jerome in *Letters* 14.6 PL 22 350–1, where Charybdis represents luxury, and *Ad monachos* 1 PL 30 (1865) 322D, where it represents avarice.

20 *Insatiabili habendi studio*; cf Prudentius *Psychomachia* 478: *amor insatiatus habendi,* which in turn is based on Virgil *Aeneid* 8.327.

21 See n14 above.

138

22 Erasmus repeats this thought in his *Carmina* 8:127–8; it is expressed in similar terms in Jerome *Letters* 14.6 PL 22 350–1; Boethius *Consolatio philosophiae* 2.3.9–10; Hugh of St Victor *De vanitate mundi* 1 PL 176 705C.

23 Cf Eccles 8:3 ('Gold and silver have destroyed many') and Prov 1:32 ('The prosperity of fools will destroy them'); for similar sentiments see Seneca *Epistulae morales* 110.3.

24 Virgil *Aeneid* 5.870–1

2 / It is dangerous to remain in the world

1 Cf Jerome *Letters* 14.6 PL 22 351: 'And those who live in the city – are they not Christians?' and Chrysostom *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae* 3.15 PG 47 376: 'What? Will all married men perish then?'

2 Cf Rev 3:5: 'And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.'

3 Cf Honorius *De vita claustrali* PL 172 1247A: 'Those who live in peace are like men sailing their ship on a calm sea ... those who have come ashore with their cargo are the men who have entered a monastery.'

139

4 Eccles 3:27

5 *Aeneid* 2.776

6 *Eclogues* 9.39–43 (with the name of Jodocus substituted for 'Galatea'), 10.42–3

7 *Fucatus ... facies*; cf Eucherius 722B: 'The façade (*facies*) ... crumbles, and all artificial splendour (*fucatus splendor*).'

8 Adapted from Virgil *Aeneid* 4.32, quoted in a similar context by Jerome *Letters* 123.14 PL 22 1055
9 Ovid *Remedia amoris* 23

140
10 Statius *Thebaid* 10.704–5

3 / Spurn wealth!

1 Pseudo-Quintilian *Declamationes* 18.12
2 1 Tim 6:10, also quoted by Eucherius 716B and Innocent III *De miseria* 2.2. Innocent's treatise served as one of the models for Erasmus' composition. For further parallels see below n4 n11 n12 n14 n17 n20, ch 4 n7, ch 6 n9 n14 n16, ch 7 n16, ch 8 n3 n5 n13 n14.
3 Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.131
4 Cf Innocent III *De miseria* 2.2: 'It commits sacrilege and theft, rapine and robbery, wars and murder'; Jerome *Letters* 55.2 PL 22 561: 'theft, murder, rapine, and perjury.'
5 Virgil *Aeneid* 3.56–7
6 Horace *Odes* 3.24.47–50
7 The similarity is also pointed out by Eucherius 716B. The pun also occurs in *Julius exclusus* (*Opuscula* line 1191 / CWE 27 196 and n206).
8 *Rei servus*; cf Erasmus *Carmina* 25:101: *servus rerum*.
9 Horace *Odes* 3.16.28 (*inter opes inops*), quoted in the same context by Erasmus in *Carmina* 25:90 and *Enchiridion* LB V 43F (*opibus inops*)

141
10 The story is told by Horace in *Epistles* 1.18.31ff.
11 Juvenal 6.165; *Adagia* II i 21; also quoted by Innocent III *De miseria* 1.20
12 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *De conversione* 7:14 PL 182 842D: 'what labour its acquisition brings, what fear its possession, what grief its loss'; repeated almost verbatim by Innocent III *De miseria* 1.14.
13 Horace *Odes* 3.16.17
14 Juvenal 14.139–40; also quoted by Innocent III *De miseria* 2.6
15 Juvenal 14.304
16 Cf *Epistles* 1.7.55ff.
17 Cf Innocent III *De miseria* 1.15: 'the days are therefore spent in labour, the nights are passed without sleep'; Ambrose *De fuga saeculi* 17 PL 14 607A: '[desire] does not let you rest by day or night.'
18 Ladus, a dragon, was guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides, according to classical mythology; cf Erasmus *Enchiridion* 92 above: 'the dragon watched over the golden fleece.'
19 The expression is Horace's (*Odes* 2.11.18); cf Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 692C: 'ivory and purple do not let you sleep in peace.'
20 Cf Eucherius 716A, but this a literary commonplace. See eg Augustine *De beata vita* 4.33 PL 32 975; Innocent III *De miseria* 2.6–8; Erasmus *Carmina* 25:81–2;

and in classical literature eg Horace *Epistles* 1.2.56; Seneca *Epistulae morales* 119.6.

21 The analogy is proverbial, cf eg H. Walther *Lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters* (Göttingen 1963–9) 21663, 29178f, 6422. It is used by Hildebert of Lavardin *Carmina* 49 PL 171 1403D and listed by Rhabanus Maurus in his *Allegoriae* PL 112 953D. Compare Erasmus *Carmina* 25:86: 'as he eats, his hunger grows,' and similarly *Enchiridion* 120 above.

22 The same expression occurs in the same context in Erasmus' *Carmina* 25:12. It may be an echo of Horace *Odes* 1.18.10.

142

23 Proverbial; cf *Adagia* I vii 63: 'Man's fortune is a circle ... with Fortuna turning her wheel.' The same sentiment is voiced in similar terms in Erasmus *Carmina* 25:105–7.

24 The Lydian king whose wealth was proverbial; cf *Adagia* I vi 74A: *Croeso ditior.*

25 A beggar in Homer (*Odyssey* 18.1ff); cf *Adagia* I vi 76: *Iro ... pauperior.*

26 Cf Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 694A: 'To that place gold and silver will not descend' and Erasmus *Carmina* 24:100, 25:112.

27 Cf Erasmus *Carmina* 25:116: 'barely a short coverlet.'

28 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *Meditatio de humana conditione* 2.5 PL 184 488C: 'We [the good deeds] shall not desert you, but shall aways be with you; we shall go with you to the judgment seat.' For other parallels with this work see ch 6 n26 n32, ch 8 n15 n21, ch 10 n28, ch 11 n15.

29 Juvenal 14.298–9; also quoted by Boethius *Consolatio philosophiae* 3.10. Tagus was a river in Spain, Pactolus in Lydia.

30 Cf Peter Damian *De contemptu saeculi* 8 PL 145 258D: 'If it pleases you to acquire wealth ... seek true wealth.'

31 Matt 6:20

32 Cf Matt 16:26; Mark 7:11; similarly Plato *Meno* 88D–E.

33 Cf Jerome *Letters* 118.5 PL 22 964: 'Secular philosophers spurned it too.'

4 / Deadly and bitter are the pleasures of the flesh

1 The comparison of desires with mistresses is traditional. Erasmus may have been thinking of Cicero *Ad Atticum* 12.3.1, where the same expression is found; but see also eg Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* 7 PL 6 738A: 'they serve at a nod of Mistress Desire'; Ambrose *De fuga saeculi* 4.17 PL 14 607A: 'flee desire like a mad mistress.'

2 *Fucatus nitor.* The expression is also used by Cicero *Ad Atticum* 13.9.5; cf Eucherius 722B *fucatus splendor* (above ch 2 n7).

3 *Timaeus* 69D; also quoted by Cicero *Cato* 44; Augustine *Contra Julianum* 4.14.72 PL 44 774. Cf Eccles 9:12: 'like fish they are caught on a hook'; Basil *Homiliae* 21.1 PG 31 541D: 'we swallow the hidden hook.'

4 Ovid *Amores* 1.8.104, paraphrased by Jerome *Letters* 15.4 PL 22 357: 'poison lurks under sweet honey.'

5 *Cato* 39

143

6 *Acerbam dulcedinem;* cf Augustine *De beata vita* 2.14 PL 32 966: *acriter dulce* (bittersweet).

7 Cf Innocent III *De miseria* 2.17: 'brief is the gullet's pleasure.'

8 Virgil *Aeneid* 6.278–9

9 The proverbial *risus sardonius* (*Adagia* III v 1), explained by Erasmus as 'demented laughter, when one laughs madly while calamity threatens.'

10 1 Cor 7:9. For similar sentiments in the same context see Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 698B: 'Do we then condemn the bond of the marriage bed? No; but we do not allow it to perfect men'; similarly Peter Damian *De perfectione monachi* PL 145 302B, who also mentions Segor (see next note) and quotes St Paul.

11 Cf Gen 19:22; Jerome (*Letters* 122.1 PL 22 1039) explains that 'Segor in translation means "small."'

144

12 Erasmus may be thinking specifically of Jerome *Letters* 22.29 PL 22 415, in which 1 Cor 7:9 (see n10 above) is quoted.

13 Juvenal 6.43

14 Cf Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 697C in the same context: 'Believe me, brother, whoever is married is wretched.' Erasmus uses similar words in a similar context in his *Enchiridion* 58–9 above.

5 / Positions of honour are meaningless and uncertain

1 Horace *Odes* 3.16.19

2 Horace *Epistles* 1.6.19

3 Cf the similar wording in Eucherius 719A.

4 Cf Eucherius 716D: 'good and bad indiscriminately.'

5 In the underworld; he was condemned forever to roll a rock up a mountain slope.

6 Ovid *Remedia amoris* 369; cf Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 692B: 'often the tall tree falls victim to gusts of winds.'

7 Tibullus 1.6.5

145

8 10.104–7, paraphrased in the same context in the *Enchiridion* 122 above

9 *Evanuerit insomniorum more;* cf Anselm *Exhortatio ad contemptum temporalium* PL 158 685A: *velut somnium evanuerunt.*

10 The topos of *ubi sunt,* also used by Erasmus' model Eucherius at 717A. For specific verbal parallels between the two passages see n15 n22 below. For similar sentiments in the context of *contemptus mundi* see eg Chrysostom *Ad Theodorum lapsum* 9 PG 47 288; Anselm *Exhortatio ad contemptum temporalium* PL 158 684D–685A; Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 184 1315A; Salutati 1.8.9–10, 27.19–22 (also mentioning Alexander and Xerxes).

11 Similarly Juvenal 10.168–9

12 The Persian king (486–465 BC) whose exploits are recounted by Herodotus. Erasmus is paraphrasing Juvenal 10.175–6.

13 The Carthaginian general (247–183/2 BC) whose exploits in the Punic war were recounted by Livy; that he split rocks with vinegar is mentioned by Juvenal 10.153.

14 Paullus Aemilius (consul in 219 BC), Julius Caesar (100–44 BC), and Pompey (106–48 BC), generals renowned for their military successes

15 Cf Eucherius 717A: 'in our time a mere story.'

146

16 A literary commonplace and a favourite of Erasmus; cf eg *Carmina* 18:9, 24:29, 101–2, and cf Virgil *Aeneid* 2.794.

17 Cf Plutarch *Alexander* 75.3–4.

18 Cf Jerome *Letters* 66.9 PL 22 644; *Adagia* II iii 48: *Homo bulla.*

19 Cf Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 701A: 'An urn holds him for whom the world had been too small' and an epitaph quoted in Camden *Remains concerning Britain* ed R.D. Dunn (Toronto 1984) 328: 'All the world did not suffice him, now eight feet of earth are enough.'

20 Juvenal 10.172–3

21 Reading *odorato amiculo* (as in the Basel edition of 1529); John O'Malley pointed out to me that *amiculum*, 'cloak,' is more likely in this context than *amiculus*, 'dear friend,' the interpretation chosen by Dresden (cf his note at ASD V-1 53:342).

22 *Radiante diademate*; cf Eucherius 717A: *irradiebat ... diademate.*

23 A Stoic ideal; cf Seneca *Epistulae morales* 113:31; cf *Adagia* I i 3: *Non bene imperat nisi quid paruerit imperio*: 'A person who is a slave to his own emotions is certainly not fit to rule over others' (CWE 31 51).

6 / Of the inevitability of death

1 *Cum nihil ita ut ea sit in oculis*; cf Eucherius 717C: *nihil ita quotidie homines, ut mortem, vident.*

147

2 River in the underworld that the shades of the dead cross to forget their life in the upper realm

3 Similarly Eucherius 717C: 'our fathers passed away.'

4 According to Plutarch *Cicero* 22.2–3 this was Cicero's comment after the execution of the Catiline conspirators; also quoted in *Adagia* I ix 50: *Fuimus Troes.*

5 Similarly Eucherius 717C, but the comparison is a literary commonplace; see eg Hugh of St Victor *De vanitate mundi* 2 PL 176 711B, 714A–B.

6 Horace *Odes* 2.3.25; cf Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 695A: 'one origin, one end'; Hugh of St Victor *De vanitate mundi* 2 PL 176 711B: 'they proceed to the same place'; and cf Eccles 6:6: 'And do not all hasten to the same place?'

7 Horace *Odes* 1.28.15–16

8 Horace *Odes* 1.28.20; Proserpina is the queen of the underworld.

9 In the following description of old age Erasmus draws on Juvenal 10.193–249. It is, however, a literary commonplace; for similar descriptions in the context of *contemptus mundi* see eg Innocent III *De miseria* 1.9; Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 694B–C; Jerome *Letters* 140.9 PL 22 1173; Erasmus *Carmina* 24:55–66.
10 Crows were proverbial for longevity; cf *Adagia* I vi 63: *Cornicibus vivacior.*
11 Virgil *Georgics* 2.484
12 Cf Erasmus *Carmina* 24:91: 'snatched from the mother's sweet breasts.' The whole section from 'Very well' to 'exempt you alone' bears a close resemblance to *Carmina* 24:83–94.

148
13 Cf Jerome *Letters* 140.16 PL 22 1177: 'No one is so decrepit and old that he does not believe he is going to live another year.'
14 *Semper rara fuit canities;* cf Innocent III *De miseria* 1.9: *et tunc enim rarissime leguntur homines plus vixisse.*
15 Men proverbial for their longevity. Cf *Adagia* I vi 65: *Tithoni senecta,* I vi 66: *Nestorea senecta,* IV i 50: *Sibylla vivacior;* for Methuselah see Gen 5:25.
16 Cf Innocent III *De miseria* 1.9: 'now few men reach the age of sixty'; similarly Jerome *Letters* 10.1 PL 22 343.
17 The comparison is a literary commonplace; for similar sentiments in the same context see Peter Chrysologus *Sermones* 162 PL 52 626B: 'a tree all bright with blossoms in the spring yielding no fruit'; compare Jerome *Letters* 140.9 PL 22 1173: 'like herbs, fresh and green in the morning, luxuriant in bloom … gradually withering … turning to straw' (an expansion of Isa 40:6).
18 *Mortis laquei;* Ps 18:5 (Vulg 17:6)
19 Cf Tertullian *Apologeticus adversus gentes* 39.14 CCL 1 152: 'They built as if they were never to die.'

149
20 2 Kings 20:1
21 A literary commonplace, cf eg Peter of Celles *Tractatus de disciplina claustrali, Epilogus* PL 202, 1143D: monks are 'without any baggage'; Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 704B: 'no baggage will hold you back'; Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* 7.1 PL 6 738A–B: 'rich men walk the road of death weighed down by much and great baggage'; similarly Jerome *Letters* 123.15 PL 22 1057.
22 Luke 12:20
23 Virgil *Georgics* 1.37
24 The famous German humanist of the fifteenth century; the quotation is from *Ad Casparem abbatem,* in *Lucubrationes aliquot* (Cologne n d) 308.
25 For similar descriptions of death see Erasmus *Carmina* 7:21–2, 24:62–4.
26 This and the following argument (see n32 below) is reminiscent of Bernard of Clairvaux *Meditatio de humana conditione.* Cf 2.5–6 PL 184 488D–489A: 'Then the soul seeing herself alone … considers of course what account of her life she will give.'
27 Cf Seneca *Epistulae morales* 71.13; Terence *Phormio* 575; *Adagia* II vi 37: 'Old age itself is a disease.'

28 Cf Erasmus *Carmina* 10:56 'snatched away ... in the flower of her age, like a rose.'

150

29 Reading *amicorum* for *comicorum*; cf Thomas Paynell's translation (1533): 'Wilte thou go to the fellowshippe of thy frendes?' (facsimile reproduction ed W.J. Hirten, Gainesville 1967, 72).

30 *Ut hirundines exacta aestate*; the same words are used by Erasmus in a contemporary composition, the *Encomium matrimoniae* (ASD I-5 406:267–8). *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.48.61 used the expression *ut hirundines aestivo tempore*, which became proverbial; cf *Adagia* I i 2 LB II 23A.

31 Cf Boethius *Consolatio philosophiae* 2.3 PL 63 674A: 'you leave it behind when you die, or it leaves you behind.'

32 Similarly Bernard of Clairvaux *Meditatio de humana conditione* 11.32 PL 184 503A: 'If I sin, conscience is there; if I am seen to be virtuous ... she is there. She stays with me in life and follows me after death.'

7 / The world is wretched and full of crime

1 Similarly Eucherius 722C: 'when the world itself already inclines toward its end ... an age whose strengths are exhausted ... verging on old age.' This is, however, a literary commonplace; cf Boethius *Consolatio philosophiae* 2.5 PL 63 696A–700A; Peter Damian *De contemptu saeculi* 33 PL 145 289A–D.

2 Eucherius 722D has a similar enumeration of evils: 'starvation, disease, devastation, wars, terrors.'

3 It has not been established to what period Erasmus is referring.

4 A period of civil war in Roman history. Sulla (138–78 BC), who was elected consul six times and fought a number of successful military campaigns, was one of the protagonists.

5 See ch 3 n24.

151

6 Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.127–31, 144–5

7 Juvenal 13.28–30, 60–63, 26–7, with minor changes

8 Cf Cicero *Cato* 42.

9 1 John 5:19

10 Terence *Eunuchus* 245

11 Cf Cyprian *De singularitate clericorum* PL 4 915A: 'Keep away, I beg you, keep away from pestilential contagion.' The comparison between diseases of the body and of the soul is biblical as well as classical; see eg Exod 15:26; Luke 5:31; Plato *Gorgias* 477E–479E; Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 4.10.23.

12 Cf Juvenal 2.78–80: 'This plague will spread further, just as in the fields the whole herd perishes from the scab of one animal.'

13 *Natura in vitia proclivis*, perhaps an echo of Augustine *De civitate dei* 22.22 CCL 48 843: *Nonne hinc apparet in quid velut pondere suo proclivis et prona sit vitiosa natura.*

14 M.P. Tilley *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London 1970) B 393; similarly *Adagia* I ii 23

152

15 Cf Basil *Homiliae* 21.8 PG 31 554C: 'people of either sex around the table.' In this passage he disapproves of partying in terms similar to those Erasmus uses.

16 Similarly and in a similar context Cicero *De finibus* 2.77; Innocent III *De miseria* 2.22

17 Horace *Epistles* 1.5.19

18 Characters from Terence's plays; Pithias stands for 'young girl,' Chremes for 'old man.'

19 Terence *Eunuchus* 732, also quoted by Jerome *Letters* 54.9 PL 22 554 and Salutati 2.8.21; the expression was proverbial (*Adagia* II iii 97).

20 Juvenal 6.325–6. Laomedontiades (ie 'descendent of Laomedon') refers to Priam, the king of Troy; Nestor was one of the Greek leaders in the Trojan war.

21 *Confessions* 2.9.17 CCL 27 25

22 Ovid *Remedia amoris* 615, with slightly different word order

23 Cf Basil *Regula* 6.1 PG 31 926B: 'lest through your eyes and ears an incentive to sin creep in'; similarly in his *Sermo de legendis* 7 PG 31 582C. Cf Ambrose *De fuga saeculi* 3 PL 14 599A commenting on Jer 9:21 ('Death has come through our window'): 'The eye is your window.'

8 / The bliss of a solitary life

153

1 Cf above ch 1 n7.

2 Cf Rom 13:11. 'The hour has come to rise from sleep'; the following passage, though a commonplace in Christian literature, is similar in its wording to Anselm *Exhortatio ad contemptum temporalium* PL 158 678A–C.

3 Cf Innocent III *De miseria* 1.23: 'Even if their dreams are not sad or terrible or fatiguing in reality, they really distress, terrify, and fatigue the dreamer.'

4 Cf Chrysostom *Ad Theodorum lapsum* 9 PG 47 288: 'If in their dreams they saw themselves living in pleasure ... when they awake afterwards they give no thanks to their dreams.'

5 *Inanium bonorum phantasmata;* similarly Innocent III *De miseria* 1.23: *phantasmatum vanarumque cogitationum caligo*

6 Biblical metaphors for hell and heaven

7 1.281

8 A combination of phrases found in Virgil *Aeneid* 4.569, 9.13

154

9 Similarly Jerome *Letters* 117.2 PL 22 954; for the comparison between diseases of the body and of the soul see above ch 7 n11.

10 Daedalus' flight, by means of a device made of bird feathers, and Hercules' labours, which required great strength and courage, are used as examples of tasks demanding an almost superhuman effort.

11 Proverbial expression; cf *Adagia* III x 94: *Per ignem incedis.*

12 Similarly Salutati 2.1.10 and Erasmus *Enchiridion* 59 above

13 Similarly Eucherius 720B

14 This sequence of questions and answers is reminiscent of Eucherius 720C–D: 'If you are fascinated by the grandeur of magnificent things, nothing is more magnificent than God; if you are taken by admiration for what belongs and is proper to glory, nothing is more glorious ... Do you seek affluence and wealth? Nothing is more abundant and copious ... Do you love comforts? Nothing is a greater comfort than his love.'

155

15 On the monk as Christ's soldier see eg Peter Damian *De institutis* 4 PL 145 339A–B, *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum* 19 ibidem 247D–248A, and *De contemptu saeculi* 27 ibidem 280A–281A; Bernard of Clairvaux *Meditatio de humana conditione* 13.35 PL 184 504C–505A and in his letters eg 1.13 and 2.12 PL 182 79B–C, 86D–87D. The passage from 'Oh, how profound' to 'cross is sweet' bears a strong resemblance to the *Enchiridion* 26–7, 59 above; in both works Erasmus quotes Rom 6:22 and Matt 1:29–30 and in roughly the same sequence speaks of Christ, the kind commander (*Enchiridion* LB V 3B: *tam benigni imperatoris; De contemptu* ADS V-1 line 619: *sub hoc tam leni ... imperatore*), his reward (*Enchiridion* 3E–F: *felicem immortalitatem; De contemptu* line 617: *beata immortalitas*), his firm promise (*Enchiridion* 3F: *qui ... fallere non potest; De contemptu* line 621: *qui fallere nescit*), and of the joy in heaven at his victory (4A; lines 623–4).

16 Horace *Odes* 4.8.29

17 Cf Rom 6:22.

18 Cf Peter Damian *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum* 19 (*Laus eremeticae vitae*) PL 145 247D–248A: 'under the invincible protection of your commander.'

19 *Qui fallere nescit*; cf Virgil *Georgics* 2.467: *nescia fallere*; cf also Eucherius 723D: 'trust in ... Jesus Christ, the truest guarantor of truth' and John 14:6: 'I am the Truth.'

20 Matt 11:29–30

21 *Qua nos voluptate afficiet felix illa libertas*; cf Bernard of Clairvaux *Meditatio de humana conditione* 14.36 PL 184 505C: *summa felicitas, felix libertas*; also compare the following passage ('But I ... stomachs') with Bernard's words ibidem: 'where we live eating, drinking, and sleeping ...'

22 A similar list of contrasts is given by Jerome *Letters* 24.3 PL 22 427: 'In the narrowness of one little cell she enjoyed the expanse of paradise ... she considered fasting enjoyment, lack of food refreshment.'

156

23 For a similar argument see Peter Damian *De contemptu saeculi* 25 PL 145 278A: 'for habituation makes the monk's cell sweet.'

9 / The greatest freedom is found in seclusion

1 Tranquillity and pleasure are rewards frequently touted by encomiasts of the monastic life. See eg Peter of Celles *Tractatus de disciplina claustrali* 7 PL 202 1112B: 'how pious, how pleasant, how just, how safe'; Honorius of Autun *De vita claustrali* PL 172 1248B: 'it is likened to a paradise'; Hugh of St Victor *De vanitate mundi* 2 PL 176 711D–712A: 'a quiet life, tranquil peace, everlasting

happiness'; Erasmus quoting his friend Cornelis of Woerden in Ep 447:342–3: 'peace and liberty and concord – in a word, it was to be fellowship with the angels.' For the association with liberty see ch 8 n21 and ch 9 n15; also *Carmen Paulini ad Licentium* (among Augustine's letters in PL 33 128): 'To serve God is true freedom.'

157

2 Cicero *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.34; cf Peter Damian *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum* 19 (*Laus eremiticae vitae*) PL 145 250B associating the monk's cell with freedom of the soul.

3 Cf Fulbert of Chartres *Laus vitae monasticae* PL 141 373.19–20 'No one speaks or keeps silence unless under order; he stands, sits, or walks according to his rule.'

4 Cf Augustine *De beata vita* 2.10 PL 32 964, quoting Cicero *Hortensius* fr 39 Müller: 'better than wanting what one ought not to want'; cf Terence *Andria* 306: 'Wish for what is possible.'

5 Cf Ambrose *De fuga saeculi* 4.17 PL 14 607A: 'She does not let you rest by day or night; she drives you on, rouses you, inflames you.'

6 Horace *Satires* 1.2.30

7 A proverbial expression (*Adagia* IV v 82); cf Horace *Epistles* 1.4.24–5: 'Ardent trader that you are ... you flee poverty through sea, through rock, through flame.' Cf Matt 23:15.

8 Cf Erasmus *Carmina* 25:5–6: 'Hence you leave your home, hence your tender children and your dear wife.'

158

9 For similar sentiments see Erasmus *Carmina* 23:64: 'Now you regret to have put your neck under the yoke.'

10 *Adelphi* 555

11 In *Carmina* (Deventer 1502) f B2

12 *Satires* 10.53. This was a proverbial expression; cf *Adagia* II iv 67 and 68.

13 Cf Gen 27:40, but 'Pharaoh' is a biblical metaphor for the power of evil.

159

14 Cf Peter Damian *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum* 19 PL 145 248A: 'sure of their triumph.'

15 See n1 above.

16 Cf Eucherius *De laude eremi* 34 PL 50 708D: 'nowhere more firmly built ... nowhere more stable.'

10 / In seclusion we enjoy a twofold peace

1 External and internal; this distinction is also made by Hugh of St Victor *Eruditionis didascalicae libri* 3.18 PL 176 776C.

2 Similarly Jerome *Ad monachos* PL 30 (1865) 325A: 'seeing and being seen, greeting and being greeted, criticizing and being praised, listening and addressing'; cf *Regula monachorum* 10 PL 30 (1865) 355A.

160

3 *Surdastra;* cf Gilbert of Hoyland *Sermones in Canticum Salomonis* 42 PL 184 219D–225A, especially 222A: *alias obsurdesco voces.* The passage is an allusion to Ps 5:2 'The voice of my beloved knocking at the door.' Cf also Jerome *Letters* 22.25 PL 22 411 and Song of Sol 3:2.

4 Cf 1 Kings 19:11–12. This and the following examples (Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself) are also cited by Eucherius *De laude eremi* 3–26 PL 50 703A–707B; cf Peter Damian *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum* 19 PL 145 248A on Moses and Elijah.

5 Cf Exod 3:1, 2.

6 Cf Exod 16:4.

7 Cf Exod 19:16ff.

8 Cf Jerome *Letters* 125.7 PL 22 1076 citing 2 Chron 6:1, 2.

9 John the Baptist; cf Matt 11:10.

10 Cf Matt 3:1.

11 Cf Matt 5:1.

12 Cf Matt 14:19.

13 Cf Matt 17:1.

14 Cf Matt 26:36.

15 Cf Matt 6:6.

16 *Quid nunc ... commemorem,* quoting Eucherius *De laude eremi* 27 PL 50 707B

161

17 On the island of Crete; for Pythagoras' retreat see Diogenes Laertius 8.3.

18 An estate on the outskirts of Athens where Plato established his school in c 385 BC; cf Jerome *Regula monachorum* 10 PL 30 (1865) 356: 'Many philosophers left the throng of the cities and sought gardens outside the cities'; similarly Eucherius *De laude eremi* 32 PL 50 708B.

19 Cf Tacitus *Dialogus de oratoribus* 9: 'If a poet wants to turn out and produce something creditable ... he must retire to the woods and groves.'

20 *Omnia late silent;* cf Eucherius *De laude eremi* 37 PL 50 709C: *silent omnia.*

21 Ovid *Remedia amoris* 579–80

22 The anecdote is told by Seneca *Epistulae morales* 1.10.1; it is repeated by Peter Cantor *Verbum abbreviatum* 72 PL 205 215C–216A and alluded to by William of St Thierry *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei* (once ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux) 12.35 PL 184 331B.

162

23 Timon was an Athenian misanthrope; cf Lucian's essay *Timon* or *The Misanthrope,* which Erasmus translated in 1506.

24 In ancient mythology avenging spirits pursuing the criminal; cf 164 below.

25 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 1.16.51: 'The usual consequences of crime are first suspicion, then gossip and rumour, then comes the accuser, then the judge.'

26 Dresden in his commentary (ASD V-1 71) quotes a Dutch proverb of the same meaning: 'Hoe argher schalck hoe beter gheluck.'

163

27 Similarly Bernard of Clairvaux *Meditatio de humana conditione* 11.32 PL 184 503B: 'Conscience accuses me, memory is the witness, reason the judge.'

28 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *Meditatio de humana conditione* ibidem 503A: 'She stays with the living, she follows the dead.'

29 *Satires* 13.192–8, 210–13

164

30 She and her lover had murdered Orestes' father; the story is the theme of Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedies.

31 See ch 7 n4.

32 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *De interiori domo* 18.30 PL 184 523D: 'Although I may escape human judgment, I cannot flee the judgment of my own conscience.'

33 Sulla's manner of death is described in Plutarch *Sulla* 36: 'This disease corrupted the whole flesh and converted it into worms.'

34 Cf Gen 4:1ff.

35 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *De interiori domo* 18.30 PL 184 523D: 'It does not let me rest, but day after day it tortures me violently.'

36 Horace *Epistles* 1.1.61

165

37 Cf Matt 6:20.

11 / The pleasures of a secluded life

1 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 1.17.55: 'The ends of goods and evils themselves, that is, pleasure and pain, are not open to mistake; where people go wrong is in not knowing what things are productive of pleasure and pain.' Epicurus (341–270 BC) was the founder of the philosophy of hedonism. Erasmus based his references to Epicurus' teachings on the account in Cicero *De finibus* 1.8.28–1.21.72, where hedonism is defended against the attacks of the Stoics.

2 *Saecularis* may refer to either laymen or secular priests. Cf *Moria* ASD IV-3 176:848 / CWE 27 140: 'priests who call themselves "secular" (as if they had been consecrated to the world, not to Christ).'

3 Mythological king of Assyria, proverbial for his life of luxury and abandonment to physical pleasures. Cf *Adagia* III vii 27: *Sardanapalus.*

4 *Deliciarum paradisum.* Cf Ezek 28:13; Peter Damian *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum* 19 (*Laus eremeticae vitae*) PL 145 246D: *Eremus ... est paradisus deliciarum.*

5 Cf *Adagia* II iv 77: *Delphinum silvis appingit, fluctibus aprum,* from Horace *Ars poetica* 30.

6 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 1.10.32: 'Those who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally encounter consequences that are extremely painful.'

7 The Greek word *asotos* means 'debauched.' Cicero (*De finibus* 2.8.23) used the adjective in its Latinized form, defining its meaning as 'men who are sick at table, who have to be carried away from dinner parties, and before they have recovered get drunk again the next day, who, as the saying goes, never see the sun set or rise, men who run through their heritage and sink into penury.'

8 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 1.18.60: 'And the climax of their torment is when they perceive too late that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame

have come to nothing. For they never attain any of the pleasures, the hope of which inspired them to undergo all their arduous toils.'

166

9 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 1.10.33: 'The wise man ... rejects pleasure to secure other greater pleasures.'

10 *Arrectis auribus;* cf eg Virgil *Aeneid* 1.152. The expression was proverbial; cf *Adagia* III ii 56.

11 Cf *Adagia* I viii 66: *Plus aloes quam mellis habet.* The words come from Juvenal *Satires* 6.181.

12 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 1.17.56: 'This then clearly appears, that intense mental pleasure or distress contribute more to our happiness or misery than bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration.'

167

13 Cf Cicero *De finibus* 1.11.38: 'Complete absence of pain Epicurus considers to be the limit and highest point of pleasure.'

14 The idea goes back to Plato; cf *Gorgias* 493A, *Phaedrus* 247B.

15 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *Sermones de diversis* 19.7 PL 183 592A 'The beginning of that joy which we sometimes feel in this world is a runoff, a droplet of that light.' The sequence of thoughts (human dignity – divine element in man – the joys of heaven) is the same as that in Erasmus and in Bernard's *Meditatio de humana conditione* 1–4 PL 184 485–93.

16 *Liber de diligendo Deo* 10.27 PL 182 990C: 'Blessed and saintly is he who is granted to have this experience, rare in our human life, unique perhaps, and brief, enduring barely one moment.'

17 Virgil *Aeneid* 6.437

18 Cf Augustine *Liber meditationum* 28 PL 40 922: 'The true, the everlasting light ... cannot be seen by anyone in this life, it is reserved for the saints, as a reward in their heavenly glory; but to believe in it, to think of it, to sense it, to be eager and desirous for it is in some way to behold and to possess it.'

19 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *In Cantica sermones* 46.3 PL 184 244A on Song of Sol 5:8: 'She languishes with love ... What is this languor but a yearning for the absent lover?'

20 Similarly Bernard of Clairvaux *In Cantica sermones* 22.1 PL 184 114A on Song of Sol 4:1: 'he soothes her with gentle words.'

21 Cf Bernard of Clairvaux *Sermones de diversis* 19.6 PL 183 591D: 'They who live in this manner will rejoice in the Holy Spirit – he who has experienced it knows whereof I speak; he who has not experienced it cannot know it.'

168

22 Cf *Adagia* I iv 2: *Satis quercus*: 'As soon as Ceres showed them the use of grain, they stopped eating acorns.'

23 *Mundi cultores;* similarly *Enchiridion* LB V 9F of *mundi amatores,* 'lovers of this world'

24 Similarly Jerome *Letters* 14.3 PL 22 349, also quoting Acts 21:13

25 The following passage is reminiscent of a scene described by Erasmus in a contemporary piece, the funeral oration for Berta Heyen. Erasmus praises

her fortitude at the deathbed of her daughter, Margareta: 'We were summoned to her ... no one could hold back the tears. Even a man with a heart of stone could not watch dry-eyed ... Only her mother ... was able to resist bursting into tears' (LB VII 557C–D).

169

26 Acts 21:13

27 Reversing the proverb 'Sweet is war to those who do not know it' (*Adagia* IV i 1: *Dulce bellum inexpertis*)

170

28 Paraphrasing *Sermones in dedicatione ecclesiae* 1.5 PL 183 520D

29 *Epistles* 2.2.128–40; he was cured of madness but regretted that he had lost his pleasant illusions.

30 *Letters* 22.7 PL 22 399, quoting Song of Sol 1:3

31 Cf Erasmus Ep 49:115–16: 'Lactantius deserves [the title] of the Christian Cicero which Agricola used to give him.' Lactantius flourished c 300 AD.

32 Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus; but cf *Moria* ASD IV-3 148:418 / CWE 27 127, where he speaks of the 'tortuous obscurities' of Thomists and Albertists, among other scholastics.

33 Compare Ep 49:107, where Erasmus refers to the Roman poets as his 'former darlings.'

34 Compare Ep 393:67–73 on his *Institutio principis christiani*, which he had composed 'in rivalry' with Isocrates, 'for he was a sophist ... I am a theologian.'

35 The comparison between pagan literature and the barbarian woman is also employed by Jerome *Letters* 70.2 PL 22 666 and by Erasmus in his *Enchiridion* 34 above. It is based on Deut 21:12.

171

36 On the fatal effects of aconite (wolfsbane) cf Pliny *Naturalis historia* 27.2.4–10. The comparison between perusing good literature and picking flowers in a garden is traditional; cf eg Jerome *Letters* 115.1, 116.2 PL 22 935, 936; Erasmus Ep 181:99–101: 'while I linger within the garden of the Greeks I am gathering by the way many flowers that will be useful for the future, even in sacred studies'; *Enchiridion* 36 above: '... cull what is best from the ancient authors, and like the bee flitting about the garden suck out only the wholesome and choice juice, leaving aside the poison'; cf *Convivium religiosum* LB I 675C / Thompson *Colloquies* 54: 'It doesn't grow in our garden: it's wolfsbane.'

37 See n4 above. The description of paradise as a vernal landscape is traditional; for verbal resemblances see eg Augustine *Liber meditationum* 26 PL 40 920: *flos purpureus rosarum ... candent lilia ... virent prata ... spirat odor* (cf Erasmus: *campi virent ... rosis formose rubentibus ... niveis liliis placide candentibus ... fulvis thymis suave spirantibus*); Hugh of St Victor *De vanitate mundi* 2 PL 176 719C: *messem fertilem, pomaria fructifera, hortos irriguos* (cf Erasmus: *arborum genus innumerum, fructuum ferax ... amnis ... irrigans omnia*).

38 Cf *Convivium religiosum* LB I 675E / Thompson *Colloquies* 54: 'Who could possibly be bored in this changing scene?'

39 Cf Prov 18:4: 'The fountain of wisdom is like an overflowing stream.'

40 *Epistulae morales* 5.51.13
41 Cf Exod 16:3.

172
42 Job 7:1
43 *Adagia* I ii 39: *Principium dimidium totius*

12

1 The chapter has no descriptive title. On its special character see introduction 130–3.
2 Similarly Basil *De renuntiatione* 3 PG 31 634A: 'You have undertaken the struggle of renunciation in vain ... if you have thrust yourself headlong into the pit'; cf Ep 447:58, where Erasmus describes his own experience in much the same words.

173
3 Cf Ep 858 21 above: 'It was the banding together of a few men aimed at nothing but a pure and simple Christianity.'
4 Cf Ep 858 22 above: 'Once ... the monastic life was a refuge from the world. Now men are called monks who spend all their time in the very heart of worldly business.'
5 Cf Peter Damian *De institutis* 29 PL 145 361D: 'Many monasteries have been corrupted so that those who leave them turn out to be more sinful than those who have just escaped shipwreck on the sea of the world.'
6 Similarly Epp 296:17–18, 447:60–1
7 Cf Jerome *Letters* 14.9 PL 22 353: 'Let a man examine himself and so let him approach [monastic life]'; cf Allen Ep 1196:330–1: 'I have warned young men not to hurl themselves rashly into the labyrinth of that life before they know themselves.'
8 Paraphrasing 1 Thess 5:21

174
9 Cf Ep 447:49, 59: 'much the largest crowd is moved by folly ... or a desire for idleness and good dinners ... escaping not into liberty but into licence to sin'; Jerome *Letters* 60.11 PL 22 596 'to be wealthier as monks than they had been as laymen.'
10 Luther vowed to enter an order when struck from his horse during a thunderstorm; cf *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar 1883–) *Tischreden* 4707.
11 An autobiographical note; cf *Compendium vitae* CWE 4 407:96–8: 'The young man was drawn to his old companion by fond memories of boyhood; he was lured on by some people and driven forward by others.'
12 Cf *Adagia* II i 19; the passage from 'some are drawn' to 'easily deceived' echoes similar passages in Epp 296:24ff, 447:26ff; *Enchiridion* 127 above.
13 An autobiographical note; cf Ep 447:158–64: 'Their guardians ... opened discussions about the monastic life, partly to secure a more speedy release from

their responsibilities and partly because ... [they thought it] a most acceptable offering to God.'

14 Cf Ep 447:31–2: 'They lie in wait for the innocence of young men and maidens.'

15 Cf *Moria* ASD IV-3 160:356 / CWE 27 131: '[They delight in the names of their orders], as if it weren't enough to be called Christians.'

16 Jerome *Letters* 14.9 PL 22 353: 'Ecclesiastic rank does not make a man a Christian'; similarly Pseudo-Anselm *Carmen de contemptu mundi* PL 158 689A: 'It is neither tonsure nor horrid dress that make a man a monk, but a virtuous soul.' Cf Erasmus in *Enchiridion* 127 above: 'Being a monk is not a state of holiness.'

17 Eg Exod 13:5

18 Famous anchorites of the third century; their example is invoked by Erasmus in a similar context and in similar terms in the *Moria* ASD IV-3 168:672 / CWE 27 135, *Enchiridion* 74 above, and *De vidua christiana* 196 below.

19 The passage parallels *Enchiridion* 75 above.

175

20 Similarly *Enchiridion* 127 above

21 The two orders are frequently linked in Erasmus' criticism of monasticism; cf Epp 1033:223, 1126:252, 1192:84–5 etc.

22 Similarly Epp 296:91–2: 'How much more consonant with Christ's teaching it would be to ... regard the sacrament of baptism as the supreme religious obligation'; 859:603–5: 'We shall not greatly feel the lack of those three vows which are man's invention in someone who has kept in sincerity and purity that one great vow, which we took in our baptism'; *Enchiridion* 58 above: 'What vow could be more holy or religious than that?'; Ep 1196:352–5: 'The most sacred vow, I hold, is the vow we take to Christ in baptism ... If a man lives up to this, there is no great reason why he should long for any other religious profession.'

ON THE CHRISTIAN WIDOW / *DE VIDUA CHRISTIANA*

Introductory note

179

1 Johann Henckel (d 1539) served as parish priest in Košice and had been appointed archdeacon of Békes and preacher to Mary of Hungary prior to Louis' death. After the battle of Mohács, Henckel urged Mary to read Erasmus' paraphrases, and it was at Henckel's request that Erasmus dedicated *De vidua christiana* to Mary (Ep 2011). See CEBR II 175–6.

2 On Mary, Henckel, and Erasmus see 'Johann Henckel' and 'Mary of Austria' in CEBR II 175–6, 399–401.

On the Christian Widow

184

1 For Mary and other members of her family, see the Hapsburg family tree, 183 above.

Readers interested in Mary queen of Hungary and Bohemia, widowhood, and the education of women during the Renaissance may wish to consult Roland Bainton *Women of the Reformation* 3 vols (Minneapolis 1971–7); Hardin Craig ed 'Elizabethan Widows' *Stanford Studies in Language and Literature* (Stanford 1941); Ghislaine de Boom *Marie de Hongrie* (Brussels 1956); Jane de Iongh *Mary of Hungary, Second Regent of the Netherlands* trans M.D. Herter (New York 1958); David Herlihy 'Did Women Have a Renaissance? A Reconsideration' *Medievalia et Humanistica* 13 (1985) 1–22; Theodore Juste *Les Pays-Bas sous Charles-Quint, Vie de Marie de Hongrie* (Brussels 1855); Ruth Kelso *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana 1956); Ian MacLean *The Renaissance Notion of Women: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge 1980); Dorothy Gies McGuigan *The Hapsburgs* (Garden City, NY 1966); Denis Sinor *History of Hungary* (New York and Washington 1959); J.K. Sowards 'Erasmus and the Education of Women' SCJ 13 (1982) 77–89; Glenda Thompson 'Mary of Hungary and Music Patronage' SCJ 15 (1984) 401–18. Cf also Juan Luis Vives *De institutione foeminae Christianae* (1524).

185

2 Cf *Adagia* I ix 48.

3 Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5; Eph 5.31

186

4 Cf Seneca *Ad Marciam de consolatione* 10.1–2, where much the same point is made in much the same language.

5 Cf *Aeneid* 4.327–30, where Dido, abandoned by Aeneas, laments that he has left no child behind to console her:
Saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset
Ante fugam suboles, si quis mihi parvulus aula
Luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret,
Non equidem omnino capta ac deserta viderer.
If only I had conceived a child by you before your flight,
if some small Aeneas were playing in my house, whose face
might bring back yours, then I would not consider myself
so utterly ensnared and deserted.

187

6 Mary's brother, Ferdinand the archduke of Austria, later after Louis' death king of Hungary and Bohemia

188

7 On the relatives of Mary mentioned in the following passage, see the family tree 183 above.

8 The notion that wisdom and fortitude are not intrinsically feminine attributes but rather betoken a masculine nature is of course a classical topos. Cf eg Seneca *Ad Marciam de consolatione* 1.1.

9 Though widowed at a young age, Mary was more fortunate in her dynastic marriage than some of her sisters. Catherine and Eleanor were both married

off to Portuguese princes, and Eleanor's husband died within a few months of the marriage. Isabella would have done better had her husband had the courtesy to do the same. In 1514 Isabella was married at the age of thirteen to King Christian II of Denmark. Notorious for his marital infidelity and generally dissolute style of living, Christian was subsequently deposed by an uprising of nobles, and Isabella died not long afterwards, before reaching her twenty-sixth birthday.

190

10 Erasmus here accepts the Stoic teachings concerning fortitude in good times while rejecting their advocacy of suicide when all is lost.

11 Although the source of this Parthian example is unclear, we may safely assume it is a rhetorical topos of some sort left over from classical antiquity. Erasmus' own age was notoriously bereft of Parthians pounding at the gates.

191

12 Polyclitus was an Argive sculptor, the most renowned exponent of the Peloponnesian school of the late fifth century BC.

13 *Adagia* II iv 68

192

14 *Panegyricus ad Philippum Austriae ducem,* written by Erasmus in 1504 (ASD IV-1 3–93 / CWE 27 1–75)

15 *Institutio principis christiani,* written by Erasmus in 1516 (ASD IV-1 97–219 / CWE 27 199–288)

193

16 Cf 2 John 1.

17 Cf Jerome *Letters* 22 *De custodia virginitatis* PL 22 394–425, *Letters* 54 *De viduitate servanda* PL 22 550–60, *Letters* 130 PL 22 1107–38; Ambrose *De virginibus* PL 16 197–244, *De viduis* PL 16 247–76, *De virginitate* PL 16 279–316, *De institutione virginis* PL 16 319–48, *Exhortatio virginitatis* PL 16 351–80, and *De lapsu virginis* PL 16 383–400; Augustine *De bono coniugali* PL 40 373–86, *De sancta virginitate* PL 40 397–428, and *De bono viduitatis* PL 40 431–50.

18 For indications of the controversy, see G.W.H. Lampe ed *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge 1969) II 338–491.

19 On 'nun' (*nonna*), see Jean Michel Hanssens 'Νόννος, *νόννα* et Nonnus, nonna' *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 26 (1960) 29–41. Erasmus is perhaps here alluding to Egypt as the place where the term originated.

194

20 Plato *Republic* 473, 485

21 A quotation from *Aeneid* 4.423: 'sola viri mollis aditus et tempora noras / you alone know the time for easy approach to him.'

195

22 Cf 1 Cor 7:14.

23 A citation from Horace's 'Postumus' ode, where the poet speaks of the wave

that must be crossed by all alike, 'sive reges, sive inopes erimus coloni / whether we be kings or starving serfs' (2.14.11–12)

196

24 Cf James 1:27, and also Luke 4:18.

25 St Paul of Thebes (d c 340), traditionally considered the first Christian hermit

26 St Antony of Egypt (251?–356), Christian hermit whose life was written by St Athanasius. Erasmus refers to these two figures in chapter 12 of the *De contemptu mundi* (174 above) and in the *Moria* (CWE 27 135, despite n472 to the contrary).

27 Cf 1–2 Sam.

28 Cf 1 Kings.

29 Cf 2 Kings 18–21.

30 Literally a messenger, one who is sent

31 Cf *Institutio principis christiani* ASD IV-1, eg 154:558–159:722 / CWE 27 224–8.

197

32 Cf *De conscribendis epistolis* 54 CWE 25 195–7.

33 Cf Gen 19.

34 Cf Gen 39.

35 Cf Dan.

36 Cf Esther.

199

37 Cf Esther 2:17, referring to her diadem.

38 Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–31), daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary, wife of Landgrave Louis IV of Thuringia. She was widowed in 1227 and canonized in 1235. Two observations Erasmus makes further on in *De vidua* (213, 235) indicate that he drew information about her from the *Legenda aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine. See *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine* trans Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger 2 vols (London 1941) II 675–89. On the book and its critics see Sherry L. Reames *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison 1985).

39 Plato evidently made several trips to Syracuse beginning in 387 and eventually sought to realize his ideal of the philosopher-king by the proper education of Dionysius II. Plato became embroiled in the hostilities between Dionysius and Dion, and his attempts met with dismal failure. His disillusionment was recorded in his (real or spurious) Seventh Letter.

40 Anacharsis, a Hellenized wise man from Scythia, travelled throughout Asia Minor and Greece studying local customs. When he returned to Scythia, he was killed by the king for his efforts to introduce the orgiastic worship of the 'mother of the gods,' of whom he had become a devotee in Scythia (Herodotus 4.76f)

200

41 Martin of Tours (c 316–97), monk and bishop. As a young man he cut his cloak in half to clothe a nearly naked beggar near Amiens. Shortly thereafter Christ appeared to him in a dream wearing the cloak he had given away. The story appears in Sulpicius Severus *Vita S. Martini* (ed J. Fontaine) 3.1.

42 2 Tim 3:12
43 Cf Luke 17:21.
44 Cf 1 Tim 5:14.
45 *De viduis* PL 16 247–76
46 Cf 1 Tim 5:14.

201

47 Cornelia, second daughter of Scipio Africanus, who after the death of her husband Sempronius Gracchus in 154 BC refused the hand of Ptolemy VII
48 Surely this is Portia the wife of Ahenobarbus and not of M. Brutus, since the wife of M. Brutus was previously married to Bibulus. The origin of the story of the Sulpitii is unclear, and the text may be corrupt.
49 Artemisia II of Caria, who built the famed mausoleum in memory of her husband and brother Mausolus when she succeeded him after his death in 353–352 BC
50 Dido, the legendary queen of Carthage, who vowed fidelity to her dead husband but broke her vow when she fell in love with the Trojan Aeneas
51 Erasmus is probably referring to works like Cyprian's *De habitu virginum* PL 4:439–64 or Tertullian's *De exhortatione castitatis* PL 2:913–30.

202

52 Cf 1 Tim 5:14.
53 Cf 1 Cor 7:13.
54 Cf Council of Florence, Session XI (1442), COD 557–8.

203

55 Though the number was originally smaller, in historical times the Roman goddess of the hearth was served by six highly honoured vestal virgins, chosen before the age of ten for a term of thirty years, at the end of which they were free to marry. Marriage for former vestals was considered unlucky, however, and it was not common. A vestal was freed from her father's control but could be scourged by the pontifex maximus for various offences and was to be entombed alive if suspected of breaking her commitment to virginity.
56 Idea common in proverbial literature, no specific source identified

204

57 Cf Luke 1:5–25, 39–45, 56–61. Sara was the wife of Abraham; cf Gen 11:29–30, 20–23.
58 Cf Jth 13.
59 Cf Judg 4–5.
60 Cf 1 Kings 17:8–16.
61 Cf Ruth.
62 Cf 2 Macc 7.
63 Cf Luke 2:36–8.
64 Cf Matt 8:14–15; Mark 1:29–31; Luke 4:38–9. Cf Ambrose *De viduis* 9–10 PL 16 263–7.
65 Acts 9:36–43.
66 Marcella (c 330–410/11) was a widow and ascetic to whom Jerome addressed a number of letters (see especially *Letters* 127); Principia, a virgin and friend of

Marcella for whom Jerome wrote a commentary on Ps 45 (Vulg 44) (*Letters* 65). Paula (347–404) was a widow and ascetic for whom Jerome was spiritual director both in Rome and in Bethlehem; Jerome wrote a eulogy of her (*Letters* 108). Laeta was Paula's daughter-in-law, to whom Jerome wrote concerning the education of her daughter (*Letters* 107). Blesilla was Paula's daughter (and Eustochium's sister); Jerome undertook his translation of Ecclesiastes at Blesilla's request. Fabiola (d 399) was a wealthy Roman matron and a friend for whom Jerome wrote two treatises (*Letters* 64, 78). Salvia (probably a corrupted form of Salvina) was the daughter of Count Gildo, governor of Africa. Jerome addressed Letter 79 to her. Sunnia and Fretela are commonly held to have been clerics resident at Constantinople. Erasmus mistakenly lists them both here among women (see PL 22 837n). Jerome addressed Letter 106 to Sunnia.

67 Juliana, an important Roman matron, was the mother of the virgin Demetrias (to whom Jerome addressed Letter 130 on virginity), and the daughter of Proba. She was known to Pope Innocent, Chrysostom, Pelagius, Jerome (*Letters* 130), and Augustine (*Letters* 188).

205

68 Exod 22:22–4
69 Deut 24:17
70 Cf Job 24:3.
71 Cf Job 22:9.
72 Ps 68:5 (Vulg 67:6)
73 Ps 132 (Vulg 131):15
74 Ps 146 (Vulg 145):9
75 Cf Isa 1:17, 23.
76 The reference is not to Isa but Jer 22:3.
77 Cf Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10.
78 Matt 23:14
79 Cf Mark 12:41–4.

206

80 Cf Luke 4:25–6; 1 Kings 17:8–16.
81 Cf Luke 4:29.
82 Cf Luke 7:11–17, 18:1–8.
83 Cf 1 Tim 5:3.
84 Cf 1 Tim 5:16.
85 Cf Matt 10:29.

207

86 1 Tim 5:3
87 Cf Matt 25:1–13.
88 Cf Matt 24:11; Gal 2:4; 2 Pet 2:1.
89 Cf Jerome *De viduitate servanda* PL 22 550–60; Ambrose *De viduis* PL 16 247–76; Augustine *De bono viduitatis* PL 40 431–50.
90 Cf Jerome *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* Lagarde 7.18: 'Iudith laudans aut confitens aut Iudaea.' Ambrose comments on Judith in *De viduis* 7.37–42 PL 16 259A–60C.

91 Cf Matt 13:12; Mark 2:24; Luke 19:26.
92 Cf 1 Tim 5:5.

208

93 Cf Matt 5:4.
94 Ps 106 (Vulg 105):1
95 Cf Jth 8:1.
96 Cf Jerome, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* Lagarde 8.27: 'Merari amarus vel amaritudines.'
97 1 Cor 7:10

209

98 Cf Jth 8:7.
99 Cf Jth 8:4–8, 9:1.

210

100 1 Cor 7:35
101 Cf Col 3:18; Eph 5:22–4.
102 Cf Luke 10:39.
103 Cf Jth 8:5; Matt 6:6.
104 Cf Acts 1:13, 2:1–4.
105 Cf Acts 10:9–15.
106 Cf Luke 2.36–8.
107 Cf Jth 8:6.

211

108 Cf Jth 10:1–5.
109 Cf 1 Pet 3:1–6.

213

110 Heb 13:4
111 St Elizabeth of Hungary; see n38 above and *Golden Legend* II 679.

214

112 For Erasmus' views on fasting and abstinence imposed by the church, see *Epistola de esu carnium* LB IX 1197–1214 / ASD IX-1 19–50.
113 Jth 8:8
114 Ibidem
115 Cf 1 Tim 3:2–7.
116 1 Tim 5:10

215

117 1 Thess 5:22
118 Still another reference to Dido, the passionate queen of Carthage who broke her vow of fidelity to her dead husband by her union with Aeneas: rumour of Dido's liaison with Aeneas travels through North Africa, according to Virgil: 'Fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullum: / mobilitate viget virisque adquirit eundo / Rumour, than which there is no swifter evil; it thrives on speed and gathers strength in the going' (*Aeneid* 4.174–5). Dido appears to

be Erasmus' favourite prototype for the widow in conflict as to whether to remarry, and it is important to bear in mind the disaster that attends on her decision.

216

119 Cf Jth 15:8.
120 Jth 8:10–13
121 Jth 8:28–9
122 Cf Jth 14.
123 Cf Jth 16:1–17.
124 Jth 16:23
125 Matt 6:2, 5, 16

217

126 Cf Jth 16:28.
127 Cf Jth 16:28–9.
128 Cf Jerome *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* Lagarde 19.6.
129 2 Cor 5:16

218

130 Cf Matt 5:18; Luke 16:17.
131 Cf Jerome *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* Lagarde 25.23: 'Bethula virgo.'
132 2 Cor 11:2
133 Cf Gal 5:17.

219

134 Cf 1 Thess 5:23.
135 2 Tim 3:12
136 Cf Matt 6:17.
137 Cf Matt 6:3, 6.
138 Cf Matt 10:16.

220

139 Cf Matt 19:12.
140 Cf Judg 4–5. Ambrose comments on Deborah in *De viduis* 8.50 PL 16 263A: 'femina iudicavit, femina disposuit, femina prophetavit, femina triumphavit, et imperio viros docuit militare femineo / a woman judged, a woman decided, a woman prophesied, a woman triumphed, and on a woman's authority men were taught to wage war.'
141 Judg 4:6
142 Cf 1 Kings 17:8–16.

221

143 Cf 1 Kings 17:6.
144 Cf Matt 15:21–8; Mark 7:24–30.
145 Cf Ruth 1:1–5. Ambrose comments on Naomi in *De viduis* 6.33–6 PL 16 257C–8C.

222

146 Cf Ruth 4:14–15.
147 Ruth 4:17
148 1 Tim 5:3
149 Cf Gal 6:6–8.
150 Cf Rom 11:17.
151 Cf Matt 1:5.
152 Cf Matt 23:15.

223

153 Cf Luke 9:62.
154 Cf *De contemptu* ch 12.
155 Cf Ruth 1:8–18. Cf Jerome *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* (Lagarde 34.9): 'Ruth videns vel festinans.' The source for Erasmus' interpretation of Orpah is not clear. Jerome (Lagarde 34.8) gives 'ceruix eius.'

224

156 Cf Ruth 2–3.
157 Ruth 3:5
158 Bethlehem, a common interpretation from the Hebrew 'Bêṭ-lèḥèm'. The source for Erasmus' interpretation of Moabite is not clear. Jerome (Lagarde 8.17) gives 'de patre.'

225

159 Ruth 1:19–21. Cf Jerome *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* (Lagarde 34.7, 14.8): 'Noemi, pulchra,' 'Mara … amaritudo.'

226

160 1 Tim 5:6
161 Cf 2 Macc 7.
162 Cf Phil 4.3; Apoc 3:5, 21:27, 22:19.

227

163 1 Tim 2:14–15
164 An evident slur on the scholastics with their constant citation of Aristotle (eg *Ethics* 1161b29); the second reference is probably to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*.
165 Cf Eph 6:4.
166 Cf 2 Macc 7.

228

167 Horace *Odes* 1.13.2
168 *Adagia* I vii 33

229

169 *Adagia* I ii 4
170 Jer 22:19

230

171 Cf Gal 3:27–8, 6:15.
172 1 Cor 15:20
173 Cf Luke 2:36–8. Ambrose comments on Anna in *De viduis* 4 PL 16 254–5.
174 Rom 12:11
175 Cf Rom 10:12, 11.17; Gal 3:27–8, 6:15.
176 Luke 2:36

231

177 Ancient Christian custom in the West allowed virgins to wear their hair loosed. See H. Leclercq 'Voile' in DACL XV, 2 3189.
178 Cf 1 Tim 5:14.
179 Luke 2:37
180 Cf 1 Tim 5:9.
181 Luke 2:37
182 Matt 21:13
183 Luke 2:37
184 Ps 50 (Vulg 49):23. Cf *Missale Romanum,* the prayer 'Memento, Domine' in the canon of the mass.
185 Cf ibidem, the prayer 'Quam oblationem' in the canon of the mass.

232

186 Luke 2:38
187 2 Tim 4:2
188 Cf Mark 12:41–4; Luke 21:1–4. Ambrose comments on this widow in *De viduis* 5 PL 16 255–7.
189 Gal 6:10

234

190 Cf 1 Kings 17:8–16.
191 Cf Matt 6:28; Luke 12:24–31.
192 Eustochium (c 370–418), daughter of Paula, to whom Jerome addressed his *De virginitate servanda* (*Letters* 11) and to whom he wrote a number of other letters

235

193 Cf Matt 25:31–45.
194 See above n38 and *Golden Legend* II 678.
195 Cf 1 Sam 16:7.

236

196 Luke 17:10

237

197 Cf Luke 7:11–17.
198 Luke 7:12

238

199 Cf Gal 4:19.

200 Cf Augustine *Confessions* 3:11–12, 9:8–12 PL 32 691–4, 770–8.
201 Luke 18:2
202 Cf Acts 9:39.

239

203 Lady Margaret founded the college for the education of preachers at Cambridge, and Erasmus himself held Cambridge's Lady Margaret lectureship. Erasmus curiously mistakes Henry's grandmother for his great-grandmother (*proavia*).
204 Matt 9:37; Luke 10:2
205 Erasmus had gone to Italy to tutor the sons of Giovanni Battista Boerio, physician to Henry VII. After sojourns in Turin, Bologna, Venice, and Rome, he returned to England in 1509.
206 Cf Acts 16:1–2; 2 Tim 1:5.
207 1 Tim 1:2
208 Phil 2:20
209 Cf 1 Tim 5:23.
210 2 Tim 1:5
211 1 Tim 4:6
212 Cf Acts 16:1.

240

213 Cf Matt 20:20–8. The reference to the apostle is not clear.
214 Rom 13:1–2

241

215 Cf Luke 8:1–3; and also Matt 27:55; Mark 15:40–1; Luke 23:49, 55.
216 Cf Rom 16:1–16.
217 1 Tim 5:14–15. Ambrose comments on this chapter in *De viduis* 2 PL 16 249C–52A.
218 1 Tim 5:11

242

219 Cf 1 Cor 7:25–8.
220 1 Cor 7:8
221 Cf 1 Tim 5:9–16.
222 1 Tim 5:9
223 1 Tim 5:9–10

243

224 1 Tim 5:11
225 1 Tim 5:11–12
226 Cf 1 Tim 5:13.

244

227 1 Tim 5:16
228 Cf 1 Cor 7:9.
229 Cf 1 Cor 7:5.
230 Cf 1 Cor 7:8–9.

245

231 1 Cor 7:28
232 Cf 1 Cor 7:9.

246

233 *Modus orandi Deum*
234 On these women, see n66 above.
235 2 Tim 3:7
236 Cf Matt 10:16.

247

237 Matt 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47; 2 Tim 3:6
238 2 Cor 11:14
239 Cf 2 Tim 4:3.
240 Cf Matt 7:15.
241 2 Tim 3:5

248

242 Eph 5:12
243 Cf Luke 10:38–42.

249

244 Cf Prov 11:24.
245 1 Tim 5:4
246 Cf Matt 15:6.
247 Matt 15:5; Mark 7:11. Cf Edward J. Mally 'The Gospel according to Mark' in JBC II 37: 'Jesus, then, refers to a practice whereby a man would evade the obligation of the written law to support his parents by dedicating his money to God, declaring it sacral by pronouncing over it *gorban* (Aramaic for "gift" offered to God), a legal fiction that still allowed the person to retain possession of the money.'
248 1 Tim 5:4

250

249 1 Tim 5:8
250 Rom 1:28
251 Rom 1:31

251

252 See n66 above.
253 Ps 132 (Vulg 131):15
254 1 Cor 7:9

252

255 Cf Gen 19.

253

256 Cf 1 Tim 5:5.

257 Heb 11:6. Note Erasmus' substitution of *spes* for Vulg *fides*: 'Sine fide autem impossibile est placere Deo.'

254

258 Cf 1 Cor 7:29.
259 Cf 1 Tim 5:5.
260 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15
261 2 Tim 3:12

255

262 1 Tim 5:5
263 1 Tim 5:6

257

264 On Henckel see 179 n1 above.

This page intentionally left blank

WORKS FREQUENTLY CITED

SHORT-TITLE FORMS FOR ERASMUS' WORKS

INDEX

This page intentionally left blank

WORKS FREQUENTLY CITED

This list provides bibliographical information for publications referred to in short-title form in introductions and notes. For Erasmus' writings, see the short-title list following.

Allen	P.S. Allen, H.M. Allen and H.W. Garrod eds *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* (Oxford 1906–47) 11 vols, plus index volume by B. Flower and E. Rosenbaum (Oxford 1958). Letters are cited by epistle and line number.
Analecta hymnica	*Analecta hymnica medii aevi* ed Guido Dreves and Clemens Blume 55 vols (Leipzig 1886–1922)
ARG	*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation History*
ASD	*Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (Amsterdam 1969–)
Auer	Alfons Auer *Die volkommene Frömmigkeit des Christen nach dem Enchiridion militis christiani des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Düsseldorf 1954)
Bataillon *Erasmo*	Marcel Bataillon *Erasmo y España* 2nd ed (Mexico City 1966)
Béné	Charles Béné *Erasme et saint Augustin* (Geneva 1969)
BHR	*Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*
Bietenholz	Peter G. Bietenholz 'Ludwig Baer, Erasmus and the Tradition of the "Ars bene moriendi"' RLC 52 (1978) 155–70
Boisset	Jean Boisset 'Le christianisme d'Erasme dans la *Diatribe sur le libre arbitre*' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* II 657–66
Bornkamm	Karin Bornkamm 'Das Verständnis christlichen Unterweisung in den Katechismen von Erasmus und Luther' *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 65 (1968) 204–30
Boyle *Rhetoric*	Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle *Rhetoric and Reform: Erasmus' Civil Dispute with Luther* (Cambridge, Mass 1983)
Bultot	R. Bultot 'Erasme, Epicure et le "De Contemptu Mundi,"' in *Scrinium* II 205–38
CCL	Corpus christianorum, series latina (Turnhout 1954–)
CEBR	*Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation* ed P.G. Bietenholz and T.B. Deutscher 3 vols (Toronto 1985–7)
Chantraine *'Mystère'*	Georges Chantraine *'Mystère' et 'Philosophie du Christ' selon Erasme: Etude de la lettre à P. Volz et de la 'Ratio verae theologiae' (1518)* (Namur 1971)
COD	*Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta* ed Giuseppe Alberigo et al 2nd ed (Freiburg 1962)

Colet	*John Colet's Commentary on First Corinthians* ed and trans Bernard O'Kelly and Catherine A.L. Jarrott, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 21 (Binghamton, NY 1985)
Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia	*Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* ed J.-C. Margolin 2 vols (Toronto 1972)
Colloquium Erasmianum	*Colloquium Erasmianum* (Mons 1968)
Coppens 'Portrait'	Joseph Coppens 'Où en est le portrait d'Erasme théologien?' in *Scrinium* II 569–98
CWE	*Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto 1974–)
DACL	*Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie* ed F. Cabrol and H. Leclerq 15 vols (1924–53)
Delumeau *Péché*	Jean Delumeau *La péché et la peur: La Culpabilisation en Occident, XIII–XVIIIe siècles* (Paris 1983)
DeMolen *Essays*	Richard L. DeMolen ed *Essays on the Works of Erasmus* (New Haven 1978)
DeMolen *Spirituality*	Richard L. DeMolen *The Spirituality of Erasmus* (Nieuwkoop 1987)
Etchegaray Cruz	Aldolfo Etchegaray Cruz 'Presence de saint Augustin dans l'*Enchiridion* et le *Symbolum* d'Erasme' *Recherches Augustiniennes* 4 (1966) 181–97
ERSY	*Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*
Eucherius	Eucherius of Lyon *De contemptu mundi et saecularis philosophiae* PL 50 711–26
Festugière	A.J. Festugière *Enchiridion militis christiani* (Paris 1971)
Fokke	G.J. Fokke 'An Aspect of the Christology of Erasmus of Rotterdam' *Ephemerides theologiae Lovaniensis* 54 (1978) 161–87
Godin *'Enchiridion'*	André Godin 'The *Enchiridion militis christiani*: Modes of an Origenian Appropriation' ERSY 2 (1982) 47–79
Godin *Erasme*	André Godin *Erasme: Lecteur d'Origène* (Geneva 1982)
Guidi	Remo L. Guidi *La morte nell' età umanistica* (Vicenza 1983)
Halkin 'Erasme critique'	Léon-E. Halkin 'Erasme et la critique du christianisme' RLC 52 (1978) 171–84
Halkin 'Mariologie'	Léon-E. Halkin 'La Mariologie d'Erasme' ARG 68 (1977) 32–55
Haverals	Marcel Haverals 'Une première redaction du "De contemptu mundi" d'Erasme dans un manuscrit de Zwolle' *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 30 (1981) 40–54
Holborn	Hajo Holborn *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus: Ausgewählte Werke* (Munich 1933)
Innocent III *De miseria*	Innocent III *De miseria humanae condicionis* ed and trans R. Lewis (Athens, GA 1978)
JBC	*The Jerome Biblical Commentary* ed Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy 2 vols in 1 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1968)

Kohls *Theologie*	Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls *Die Theologie des Erasmus* 2 vols (Basel 1966)
Lagarde	Paul Anton de Lagarde *Onomastica sacra* 2nd ed (Göttingen 1887; repr CCL 72, Turnhout 1959)
LB	J. Leclerc ed *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia* 10 vols (Leiden 1703–6)
McConica	James K. McConica 'Erasmus and the Grammar of Consent' in *Scrinium* II 77–99
Mansfield	Bruce Mansfield *Phoenix of His Age* (Toronto 1979)
Marcel	Raymond Marcel 'L'*Enchiridion militis christiani*: Sa genèse et sa doctrine, son succès et ses vicissitudes' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia* II 613–46
Massaut 'Erasme, Sorbonne'	Jean-Pierre Massaut 'Erasme, La Sorbonne, et la nature de l'Eglise' *Colloquium Erasmianum* 89–116
Massaut 'Histoire'	Jean-Pierre Massaut 'Histoire, humanisme et théologie: Un Erasme des profondeurs' RHE 69 (1974) 453–69
Massaut 'Humanisme'	Jean-Pierre Massaut 'Humanisme et spiritualité chez Erasme' in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* VII (1969) 1006–28
O'Donnell *Enchiridion*	Anne M. O'Donnell *Enchiridion militis christiani: An English Version* (Oxford 1981)
O'Donnell 'Rhetoric'	Anne M. O'Donnell 'Rhetoric and Style in Erasmus' *Enchiridion militis Christiani' Studies in Philology* 77 (1980) 26–49
Olin *Six Essays*	John C. Olin *Six Essays on Erasmus* (New York 1979)
O'Malley *Catholicism*	John W. O'Malley ed *Catholicism in Early Modern History: A Guide to Research* (St Louis 1988)
O'Malley 'Sacred Rhetoric'	John W. O'Malley 'Erasmus and the History of Sacred Rhetoric: The *Ecclesiastes* of 1535' ERSY 5 (1985) 1–29
O'Malley 'Grammar'	John W. O'Malley 'Grammar and Rhetoric in the *Pietas* of Erasmus' *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 18 (1988) 81–98
O'Malley *Praise and Blame*	John W. O'Malley *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450–1521* Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 3 (Durham, NC 1979)
Opuscula	W.K. Ferguson ed *Erasmi opuscula: A Supplement to the Opera omnia* (The Hague 1933)
Padberg	Rudolf Padberg *Erasmus von Rotterdam: Seine Spiritualität, Grundlage seines Reformprogramms* (Paderborn 1979)
Payne	John Payne *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond 1970)
PG	J.P. Migne ed *Patrologiae cursus completus ... series graeca* (Paris 1857–1912) 162 vols
Pico	Joannis Pici Mirandulae 'Regulae XII, partim excitantes, partim dirigentes hominem in pugna spirituali' in *Opera omnia* I (Basel 1557; repr Hildesheim 1969) 332–3

Rahner	H. Rahner *Symbole der Kirche* (Salzburg 1964)
RHE	*Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*
PL	J.P. Migne ed *Patrologiae cursus completus ... series latina* 221 vols (Paris 1844–1902)
RLC	*Revue de Littérature Comparée*
RSR	*Recherches de Science Religieuse*
Salutati	Coluccio Salutati *De saeculo et religione* ed B.L. Ullmann (Florence 1957)
Schottenloher	O. Schottenloher 'Erasmus, Johann Popenruyter und die Entstehung des Enchiridion militis christiani' ARG 45 (1954) 109–16
SCJ	*The Sixteenth Century Journal*
Scrinium	*Scrinium Erasmianum* ed Joseph Coppens 2 vols (Leiden 1969)
Sowards	J.K. Sowards 'Erasmus and the Education of Women' SCJ 13, 4 (1982) 77–89
Stupperich 'Enchiridion'	Robert Stupperich 'Das Enchiridion militis Christiani des Erasmus von Rotterdam nach seiner Entstehung, seinem Sinn und Charakter' ARG 69 (1978) 5–23
Telle	Emile V. Telle *Erasme de Rotterdam et le septième sacrement* (Geneva 1954)
Tenenti	Alberto Tenenti *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento (Francia e Italia)* (Turin 1957)
Tentler	Thomas N. Tentler 'Forgiveness and Consolation in the Religious Thought of Erasmus' *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965) 110–33
Thompson *Colloquies*	Craig R. Thompson ed and trans *The Colloquies of Erasmus* (Chicago and London 1965)
Timmermans	B. Timmermans 'Valla et Erasme, défenseurs d'Epicure' *Neophilologus* 23 (1938) 414–19
Tracy 'Humanists'	James D. Tracy 'Humanists Among the Scholastics: Erasmus, More, and Lefèvre d'Etaples on the Humanity of Christ' ERSY 5 (1985) 30–51

SHORT-TITLE FORMS FOR ERASMUS' WORKS

Titles following colons are longer versions of the same, or are alternative titles. Items entirely enclosed in square brackets are of doubtful authorship. For abbreviations, see Works Frequently Cited.

Adagia: Adagiorum chiliades 1508, etc (Adagiorum collectanea for the primitive form, when required) LB II / ASD II-4, 5, 6 / CWE 30-6
Admonitio adversus mendacium: Admonitio adversus mendacium et obtrectationem LB X
Annotationes in Novum Testamentum LB VI
Antibarbari LB X / ASD I-1 / CWE 23
Apologia ad Caranzam: Apologia ad Sanctium Caranzam, or Apologia de tribus locis, or Responsio ad annotationem Stunicae ... a Sanctio Caranza defensam LB IX
Apologia ad Fabrum: Apologia ad Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensem LB IX
Apologia adversus monachos: Apologia adversus monachos quosdam hispanos LB IX
Apologia adversus Petrum Sutorem: Apologia adversus debacchationes Petri Sutoris LB IX
Apologia adversus rhapsodias Alberti Pii: Apologia ad viginti et quattuor libros A. Pii LB IX
Apologia contra Latomi dialogum: Apologia contra Iacobi Latomi dialogum de tribus linguis LB IX
Apologiae contra Stunicam: Apologiae contra Lopidem Stunicam LB IX / ASD IX-2
Apologia de 'In principio erat sermo' LB IX
Apologia de laude matrimonii: Apologia pro declamatione de laude matrimonii LB IX
Apologia de loco 'Omnes quidem': Apologia de loco 'Omnes quidem resurgemus' LB IX
Apologia invectivis Lei: Apologia qua respondet duabus invectivis Eduardi Lei *Opuscula*
Apophthegmata LB IV
Appendix respondens ad Sutorem LB IX
Argumenta: Argumenta in omnes epistolas apostolicas nova (with Paraphrases)
Axiomata pro causa Lutheri: Axiomata pro causa Martini Lutheri *Opuscula*

Carmina varia LB VIII
Catalogus lucubrationum LB I
Christiani hominis institutum, carmen LB V
Ciceronianus: Dialogus Ciceronianus LB I / ASD I-2 / CWE 28
Colloquia LB I / ASD I-3
Compendium vitae Allen I / CWE 4
[Consilium: Consilium cuiusdam ex animo cupientis esse consultum] *Opuscula*

De bello turcico: Consultatio de bello turcico LB V
De civilitate: De civilitate morum puerilium LB I / CWE 25
Declamatio de morte LB IV

Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas: Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas sub nomine facultatis theologiae Parisiensis lb ix
Declamatiuncula lb iv
De concordia: De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia lb v
De conscribendis epistolis lb i / asd i-2 / cwe 25
De constructione: De constructione octo partium orationis, or Syntaxis lb i / asd i-4
De contemptu mundi: Epistola de contemptu mundi lb v / asd v-1 / cwe 66
De copia: De duplici copia verborum ac rerum lb i / cwe 24
De immensa Dei misericordia: Concio de immensa Dei misericordia lb v
De libero arbitrio: De libero arbitrio diatribe lb ix
De praeparatione: De praeparatione ad mortem lb v / asd v-1
De pueris instituendis: De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis lb i / asd i-2 / cwe 26
De puero Iesu: Concio de puero Iesu lb v
De ratione studii lb i / asd i-2 / cwe 24
De recta pronuntiatione: De recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiatione lb i / asd i-4 / cwe 26
Detectio praestigiarum: Detectio praestigiarum cuiusdam libelli germanice scripti lb x / asd ix-1
De tedio Iesu: Disputatiuncula de tedio, pavore, tristicia Iesu lb v
De vidua christiana lb v / cwe 66
De virtute amplectenda: Oratio de virtute amplectenda lb v
[Dialogus bilinguium ac trilinguium: Chonradi Nastadiensis dialogus bilinguium ac trilinguium] *Opuscula* / cwe 7
Dilutio: Dilutio eorum quae Iodocus Clithoveus scripsit adversus declamationem suasoriam matrimonii
Divinationes ad notata Bedae lb ix

Ecclesiastes: Ecclesiastes sive de ratione concionandi lb v
Elenchus in N. Bedae censuras lb ix
Enchiridion: Enchiridion militis christiani lb v / cwe 66
Encomium matrimonii (in De conscribendis epistolis)
Encomium medicinae: Declamatio in laudem artis medicae lb i / asd i-4
Epigrammata lb i
Epistola ad Dorpium lb ix / cwe 3
Epistola ad fratres Inferioris Germaniae: Responsio ad fratres Germaniae Inferioris ad epistolam apologeticam incerto autore proditam lb x
Epistola ad graculos: Epistola ad quosdam imprudentissimos graculos lb x
Epistola apologetica de Termino lb x
Epistola consolatoria: Epistola consolatoria virginibus sacris lb v
Epistola contra pseudevangelicos: Epistola contra quosdam qui se falso iactant evangelicos lb x / asd ix-1
Epistola de esu carnium: Epistola apologetica ad Christophorum episcopum Basiliensem de interdicto esu carnium lb ix / asd ix-1
Exomologesis: Exomologesis sive modus confitendi lb v
Explanatio symboli: Explanatio symboli apostolorum sive catechismus lb v / asd v-1
Expostulatio Iesu lb v

Formula: Conficiendarum epistolarum formula (see De conscribendis epistolis)

Hymni varii LB V
Hyperaspistes LB X

Institutio christiani matrimonii LB V
Institutio principis christiani LB IV / ASD IV-1 / CWE 27

[Julius exclusus: Dialogus Julius exclusus e coelis] *Opuscula* / CWE 27

Lingua LB IV / ASD IV-1
Liturgia Virginis Matris: Virginis Matris apud Lauretum cultae liturgia LB V / ASD V-1

Methodus (see Ratio)
Modus orandi Deum LB V / ASD V-1
Moria: Moriae encomium LB IV / ASD IV-3 / CWE 27

Novum Testamentum: Novum Testamentum 1519 and later (Novum instrumentum for the first edition, 1516, when required) LB VI

Obsecratio ad Virginem Mariam: Obsecratio sive oratio ad Virginem Mariam in rebus adversis LB V
Oratio de pace: Oratio de pace et discordia LB VIII
Oratio funebris: Oratio funebris Berthae de Heyen LB VIII

Paean Virgini Matri: Paean Virgini Matri dicendus LB V
Panegyricus: Panegyricus ad Philippum Austriae ducem LB IV / ASD IV-1 / CWE 27
Parabolae: Parabolae sive similia LB I / ASD I-5 / CWE 23
Paraclesis LB V, VI
Paraphrasis in Elegantias Vallae: Paraphrasis in Elegantias Laurentii Vallae LB I / ASD I-4
Paraphrasis in Matthaeum, etc (in Paraphrasis in Novum Testamentum)
Paraphrasis in Novum Testamentum LB VII / CWE 42–50
Peregrinatio apostolorum: Peregrinatio apostolorum Petri et Pauli LB VI, VII
Precatio ad Virginis filium Iesum LB V
Precatio dominica LB V
Precationes LB V
Precatio pro pace ecclesiae: Precatio ad Iesum pro pace ecclesiae LB IV, V
Progymnasmata: Progymnasmata quaedam primae adolescentiae Erasmi LB VIII
Psalmi: Psalmi, or Enarrationes sive commentarii in psalmos LB V / ASD V-2, 3
Purgatio adversus epistolam Lutheri: Purgatio adversus epistolam non sobriam Lutheri LB IX

Querela pacis LB IV / ASD IV-2 / CWE 27

Ratio: Ratio seu Methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam (Methodus for the shorter version originally published in the Novum instrumentum of 1516) LB V, VI

Responsio ad annotationes Lei: Liber quo respondet annotationibus Lei LB IX
Responsio ad collationes: Responsio ad collationes cuiusdam iuvenis gerontodidascali LB IX
Responsio ad disputationem de divortio: Responsio ad disputationem cuiusdam Phimostomi de divortio LB IX
Responsio ad epistolam Pii: Responsio ad epistolam paraeneticam Alberti Pii, or Responsio ad exhortationem Pii LB IX
Responsio ad notulas Bedaicas LB X
Responsio ad Petri Cursii defensionem: Epistola de apologia Cursii LB X
Responsio adversus febricitantis libellum: Apologia monasticae religionis LB X

Spongia: Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni LB X / ASD IX-1
Supputatio: Supputatio calumniarum Natalis Bedae LB IX

Virginis et martyris comparatio LB V
Vita Hieronymi: Vita divi Hieronymi Stridonensis *Opuscula*

Index

Aaron 31
Abraham 12, 32, 49, 70, 80, 88, 102–3
Acarie, Barbe Avrillot, Madame (Marie de l'Incarnation) li
accommodation, theory of xviii–xix, xxix, xxx, 104
Achilles 27, 36
Act of Supremacy, English (1534) 6
Adam 25, 47, 68, 76, 88, 227
Adelphus, Johann, translator of *Enchiridion* 4
Adolph of Burgundy 2
Adrastea 57
Aeneas 27, 36, 58, 186
Aesculapius 64
Aesop 92, 113
Agricola, Rudolph 149
Ajax 89
Albert the Great, St 170
Alcibiades 67
Alexander the Great 100, 145–6
allegorical interpretation. *See* Scripture
almsgiving xxv; and other works of charity 232–6
Alvaro Pelayo 10
Amalekite(s) 31
ambition 12, 13, 16, 17, 21; remedies against 121–2
Ambrose, St xlviii, l, 34, 101, 127, 170, 182, 193, 200, 246; *De viduis* xlviii–xlix
Anacharsis 199
angels, angelic world 36, 65
anger, vengeance, remedies against 123–6
Anna, widow in Luke's Gospel xlix, 180, 204, 210, 230–2
Anna of Bohemia, sister of King Louis of Hungary 178, 179
Anne de Candale, wife of Vladislav II 178
Anselm, St xii, xxii; *Rhythmus de contemptu mundi* 130
Anthony of Egypt, St 74, 132, 174, 196
Apelles 72
Apollonia, St 64
Architas, the Pythagorean 142
Ariadne 54
Aristotle, Aristotelianism (Peripatetics) 44, 69, 85, 227
arrogance, remedies against 122–3
ars moriendi, genre of xxxix
Artemisia (II), queen of Caria 201
Artour, Thomas, translator of *Enchiridion* 6
Asoti 165
Assyrians 216
Athens, Athenians 87, 161, 198, 199
Auer, Alfons xl
Augustine, St xlviii, l, 3, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 33, 34, 69, 87, 101, 103, 127, 152, 170, 182, 192, 193, 204, 238, 246; *Confessions* 87; *De doctrina christiana* 69
avarice 12–13, 16–18, 21, 233; remedies against 118–21. *See also* wealth

Babylon 56, 59, 82, 106, 153
bad company, effects of 151–2, 197–200

baptism xxii, xxiii, xxiv, xxv, xlii, 22, 26, 54, 58, 71, 132, 175, 197, 255
Barak 220
Barbara, St 63
Barlandus, Adrianus Cornelii 3
Basil, St xiv, 21, 33, 246; commentary on Isaiah, Erasmus' translation of 4
Bataillon, Marcel xxx
Batt, Jacob 2
Belial 57
beliefs, paradoxes of true Christianity 93–104
Bellarmine, Cardinal Robert xv
Béné, Charles xiv
Benedict, St 21, 106
Benedictines, Benedictine order 19
Bernard of Clairvaux, St xli, 167, 170; *Meditatio de humana conditione* 130
Berquin, Louis de xxxiv, xxxvi, 5
Bethlehem 223, 224, 251
Bethulia 216, 218–19
Biel, Gabriel 10
Bietenholz, Peter xxxvi
bishops xxi, 14, 17, 21, 101, 103
Blesilla, widow known to Jerome 204
Blount, William, Lord Mountjoy 2
Boaz 224, 225
body of Christ, doctrine of xxi, xxiv, xlii, 15, 29, 71, 79, 88, 94–6, 110–11, 125, 235, 236, 251
Boece, Hector, Erasmus' catalogue for ix, xii, xxvi
Bonaventure, St (Seraphic Doctor) 10
Borssele, Anna van 2
Botzheim, Johann von, Erasmus' catalogue for ix, xlvii
Boyle, Marjorie O'Rourke xxviii
Brahmans 93
Briçonnet, Bishop Guillaume (II) 5
Brutus (Lucius Junius Brutus) 87
Bucer, Martin 6

cabbala xvi
Cadmus 5
Caesar, Julius 100, 145
Cain 164
Calvin, John, *Institutes* xlii
Camillus (I), Marcus Furius 87
Canaanite woman from Sidon 221
cardinals 14, 17
Carmelites, Carmelite order xlvi, 95, 175
catechesis, catechisms xxxi, xxxii, xxxvii
Catechismus Romanus xxxvii
Catherine, sister of Mary of Hungary 188
Catherine of Aragon, maternal aunt of Mary of Hungary xxxiv, xlviii, 188, 195, 257
Catherine of Genoa, St xvi
Catherine of Siena, St xvi
Cato the Elder 142
Cato Uticensis, great-grandson of Cato the Elder 87
celestial philosophy. *See* philosophy of Christ
celibacy xxxiii, xxxiv, 22. *See also* chastity, virginity
Cephalus 25
ceremonies xviii, xlv, 12, 17, 19, 20, 63, 73–83. *See also* monastic life
Chantal, Jeanne Françoise de, St 1
Chantraine, Georges xiv
Charles v, emperor (Charles I of Spain) xlviii, 179, 188, 192, 257
Charybdis 30, 79, 137
chastity xviii, 180, 242–5; vows of 22, 244–5. *See also* celibacy, virginity
children, education of 85, 202–3, 226–30, 248–51
Christ: as goal 61–5; 'human consciousness' of xxxix; as king 100–1; as model of piety 84–93; as spouse 254–5; as teacher xxii–xxiii, 84–93
Christian philosophy. *See* philosophy of Christ
Christian soldier, metaphor of xxiii, xlii, xliii–xliv, 26–7
Christopher, St 63
Cicero, Cieronianism xxvii, 76, 142, 147, 157; *De officiis* xx, xxvii, xliv, 2; *De senectute* xxvii

Circe 68
classical literature 33–4, 67, 127, 133, 161, 170–1. *See also* philosophers, pagan
Clichtove, Josse xxxiv
Colet, John xi, xxxix, xl, 2, 3; author of *Catechizon* xxxvii
Colletines, Colletine order 95
common people, crowd 15–16, 85–93, 104, 110, 193
Compostela, shrine to St James at 18, 124
confession xxxii, 9, 207
consolation 184–7, 240–1
Coppens, Joseph xxxiii
Corinth, as corrupt city 198
Cornelia, widow of Gracchus 201
Cornelis of Woerden 130
cosmetics, perfume xviii, 225–6
Counter-Reformation xxxii, l
courage 27, 91
Courtebourne, castle of 3
Coverdale, Myles, abridger of *Enchiridion* 6
Crassus 102
Crates, Cynic philosopher 62, 161–2
crime, world full of 150–2
Croesus 89, 102, 142, 150
cross of Christ 110, 122
Cupid(s) 116
Cynics, Cynicism 93, 104
Cyprian, St 33, 170, 246

Daedalus 154
dance 152
Daniel 197
daughters-in-law 222–4
David 28, 31, 32, 36–7, 68, 88, 90, 102, 103, 109, 137, 195, 196, 221
Day, John 6
death xxiii, xxxix, 113, 146–50, 186–7; of the soul 28–29, 229–30, 237–8, 255. *See also* mourning
Deborah, model of widowhood 180, 204, 220
Delumeau, Jean xxxix
Demetrias, granddaughter of Proba 204, 246
Democritus 158
demonstrative rhetoric. *See* rhetoric
Demosthenes 85, 109
despair, faint-heartedness 109
Desparts, Jacques 9
Devereux, E.J. 6
devil. *See* Satan
dialectic 18
Dido, founder of Carthage 201
Diogenes 199
Dionysius, author of *De divinis nominibus* 69
Dionysius, tyrant of Sicily 199
dispensations 13, 18
Domański, Juliusz 7
Dominicans, Dominican order xlvi, 10, 95, 175
Dorcas 204, 238
Dorp, Maarten van, Erasmus' letter to xvi, 3
Dresden, Sem xlvii
dress, monastic and clerical 19
Durandus of Saint-Pourçain 10

Ebionites 18
Egypt 24, 31, 34, 56, 59, 62, 82, 160, 171
ekphrasis. *See* painting a word-picture
Eleanor, sister of Mary of Hungary 188
elements, the four 16
Elijah 160, 206, 220–1, 234
Elizabeth, St, mother of John the Baptist 204
Elizabeth of Hungary, St 199, 213–14, 235; canonization of xxxiv
Ephesus 198
Epictetus 119
Epicurus, Epicureanism xxviii, 89, 165–8
epideictic rhetoric. *See* rhetoric
Erasmus: and canon law xv, xvi, xxxiii; and christology xxii–xxiii, xxxix; and doctrine xiv–xv; and ecclesiology xiv; and Fathers of the church xiv, xv, xxvii–xxviii, xxxviii, xlviii; and humanism, as humanist xiv, xvi, xvii, xix, xx, xxiii, xxv,

xliii; and liturgy xiv, xviii, xxxv–xxxvi; and mariology xiv, xxxv–xxxvi; and ministry xii, xvii, xxi, xxix, xxxi–xxxii, xxxvii–xxxix; as moralist xviii; as poet, and poetry xxix; and popular piety xvii–xviii; and prayer xxxvi; as religious reformer xvii, xxi; and sacramental theology xiv; and scholasticism xii, xvi, xvii, xix, xx, xxvi, xxvii; as theologian xii–xiv

Erasmus, original works
- *Christiani hominis institutum* xxxvii
- *Colloquia* xiii
- *Convivium religiosum* xi, xviii, xx
- *De contemptu mundi* ix, x, xiv, xxviii, xxxiii, xliv–xlvii; epilogue to 130–3
- *De immensa Dei misericordia* xxvi, xxxviii
- *De libero arbitrio* xiii, xxiii, xxviii, xxxviii
- *De praeparatione ad mortem* x, xxiii, xxxvi, xxxix
- *De tedio Iesu* ix, xxvii, xxxix
- *De vidua christiana* x, xv, xxv, xxxiii, xxxv, xlviii–li
- *Ecclesiastes* x, xiii, xv, xxi, xxix, xxxi, xxxiii, xxxvii–xxxviii
- *Enchiridion* xi, xii, xiii, xiv, xviii, xxi, xxii, xxiii, xxv, xxx, xxxiii, xxxv, xxxix, xl–xlvii, 2–7, 12, 132
- *Encomium matrimonii* x, xxxiv, 5
- *Epistola consolatoria* xxxiii, xxxv
- *Exomologesis* xii, xv, xxi, xxxvii–xxxviii
- *Explanatio symboli* xiii, xxi, xxiv, xxv, xxxvi
- *Funus* xviii
- *Inquisitio de fide* xxxvii
- *Institutio christiani matrimonii* xv, xxxiii–xxxiv, xxxv, xlviii; dedication to Catherine of Aragon 257
- *Institutio principis christiani* xlix; dedicated to Charles v 192, 257
- *Liturgia Virginis Matris* (Liturgy of Loreto) xxxv, xxxvi, xxxviii
- *Lucubrationes* (*Lucubratiunculae*) x, xl, 2, 3, 4
- *Methodus verae theologiae* xi
- *Modus orandi Deum* xxxvi–xxxvii
- *Moriae encomium* xlii, 3
- *Obsecratio ad Virginem Mariam* xxxv
- *Oratio funebris* xlix
- *Paean Virgini Matri* xxxv
- *Panegyricus* xlix, 192
- *Paraclesis* xi, xxii, xxvi
- *Paraphrasis in Novum Testamentum* 179; *in Johannem*, dedicated to Ferdinand I 257
- *Precatio ad Virginis filium Iesum* xxiii
- *Precatio dominica* xxxv
- *Precationes* x, xxxv–xxxvi
- *Querela pacis* 5
- *Ratio verae theologiae* xii
- *Virginis et martyris comparatio* xxxiii, xxxv

Erasmus, translations and editions
- Ambrose *De viduis* xlviii–xlix
- Basil's commentary on Isaiah 4
- Cicero *De officiis* xliv, 2

Esau 48
eschatology xxiii–xxiv. *See also* death, world
Esther 197–200
Eucharist xxv, 70–1
Eucherius, bishop of Lyon xiv, xlvii, 130, 133
Eunice, mother of Timothy 239
Euripides 87
Eustochium, daughter of Paula 234–5
Eutrapelus 140–1
evangelization xliv, 10–12
Eve 25, 48, 68, 227
Ezechiel 32, 82, 205

Fabiola, widow known to Jerome 204
Fabricius (Gaius Fabricius Luscinus) 87
faith 55–6, 86
Fantazzi, Charles xiv, xl
Farel, Guillaume 5
fasting xxv, 22, 80–1, 210, 213–14, 231
Fates 184, 187
Ferdinand I, emperor, brother of Mary of Hungary 179, 187, 188, 257
Ferdinand of Aragon, king 188

Fernández de Madrid, Alonso, translator of *Enchiridion* 4
Festugière, A.-J. 7
flesh. *See* man, outer and inner
Fokke, G.J. xxxix
Fortune 158, 186–91
Foxe, John 6
Francis of Assisi, St 21, 71–2, 106
Franciscans, Franciscan order (Minorites) xlvi, 10, 19, 95
Frederick III, emperor 188
free will and grace xxiii, 235
Fretela, supposed widow known to Jerome 204, 246
Fumaroli, Marc xxxviii
Furies 162, 164

George, St 64
gluttony, drunkenness xviii, 18, 152
Godin, André xiv
Goliath 37, 68
good works. *See* virtue
Gough, Graham 6–7
Gough, John 6
grace xxxviii, xliii. *See also* free will
Graces, three 201
Gregorian reform xv

Hannibal 100, 145
happiness, true 153–6
Hapsburgs, genealogical table of 183
hatred. *See* love and hatred
Haverals, Marcel xliv, xlvii, 131
Hector 27
Hegius, Alexander 158
Henckel, Johann 179–80, 257; letter to Erasmus xlviii–xlix
Hercules 25, 49, 68, 107, 154
Hesiod 39, 46, 108
Heyen, Berta xlix
Hezekiah 196
Hiero, St 64
Hilary, St 246
Holborn, Hajo 7
Holofernes 216, 219
Homer 27, 36, 43, 137
Horace 86, 140, 141, 147, 170, 228
Hosea 34
How, William 6
Hugshofen, monastery of 8
humanism, humanists xix, xx, xxiii, xxv, xliii, xliv

Ignatius Loyola, St xiv, xvi, xxi, xxx–xxxi, xxxii; *Spiritual Exercises* of xxx
ignorance 55–6
Imitation of Christ xxxiv, xl–xliii
Immaculate Conception, doctrine of xxxv
Index librorum prohibitorum xiii
indulgences 13
injury, response to 96–8
Innocent III, pope *De miseria conditionis humanae* 130
invocation of the saints. *See* saints
iron age 150–1
Irus 142
Isaac 12, 32, 49
Isabella, queen of Castile, maternal grandmother of Mary of Hungary 195
Isabella, sister of Mary of Hungary 187, 188
Isaiah 70
Ishmael 49
Israel, Israelite(s) 32, 34, 88, 220, 232
Italy, lack of preaching in 239
Ixion 59

Jacob 48, 50
Jacob's ladder 84
James, St, brother of St John 64. *See also* Compostela
Jerome, St xiv, xxvii, xxxix, xlviii, l, 21, 33, 34, 46, 101, 106, 120, 143, 170, 182, 193, 204, 246
Jerusalem 18, 153, 216, 229, 232, 250
Jesuits, Jesuit order xxi, xxxii
Jethro 33
Jews, Judaism, Jewish practices xlv, 19, 20, 70, 73–84, 88, 127, 198, 206, 210–11, 214, 220, 230, 237, 242
Joakim, high priest 216
Joanna, mother of Mary of Hungary 195

Job 24, 64, 106
Jodocus, pseudonymous addressee of *De contemptu mundi* 130, 134, 135
John the Baptist, St 160, 204
John Chrysostom, St 21, 246
John the Evangelist, St 64, 193; mother of 239–40
Jonas, Justus, Erasmus' letter to xi
Jordan River 160
Joseph, patriarch 197
Joseph, St, husband of Mary 204, 215
Jud, Leo 4
Judas 73
Judith: attitude toward wealth and earthly glory of 216–17; daughter of Merari 208; model of widowhood xlix, 180, 204, 207–20, 257; patriotism of 215–16; wife of Manasses 217
Juliana, widow known to Augustine 204, 246
Juno 107
Juvenal 145, 163

Kohls, Ernst-Wilhelm xl

Lactantius 170
Laeta, widow known to Jerome 204
laity and Scripture 193
Laomedontiades 152
lawyers 9
learning, learned piety xxi, 8, 30–2, 62, 127
lechery 18
Lefèvre d'Etaples, Jacques 5
Leo x, pope 11
Lethe 147
liberty of spirit xx, 20, 78, 201; in monastic seclusion 156–9
Livy 68, 78
Lois, grandmother of Timothy 239
Lot 68, 102, 197, 252
Louis ix, St, king of France, canonization of xxxiv
Louis, king, husband of Mary of Hungary 178–80
love and hatred 90
Lucan 153
Luís de León xvi
lust 142–4; remedies against 113–18
Luther, Martin xiii, xx, xxi, xxiii, xxx, xxxvii, xxxviii, xliii, 179
Lynceus 116

Maccabee brothers 227, 229; mother of 180, 204, 226–30
Machiavelli, Niccolò xlix
Maldonado, Juan 4
man, outer and inner 35, 41–3, 46–54, 218–19
Manasses, husband of Judith 217
Manrique, Don Alonso 4
Mansfield, Bruce xiii
Mara (name of Naomi) 225–6
Marcel, Raymond 5
Marcella, widow known to Jerome 21, 204, 246
Marcionites 18
Margaret of Austria (1), paternal aunt of Mary of Hungary 179, 188
Margaret (Beaufort), Countess of Richmond and Derby 239
Margarete, virgin in *De contemptu mundi* 168–9
Margolin, J.-C. xxxiv
Marillax, Louise de l–li
marriage xviii, xix, xxiii–xxxv, 18, 117, 143–4, 185, 209–10; compared with virginity and widowhood 201–5; remarriage 230–1, 241–5, 251–3; and remarriage compared with virginity 212–13
married women, clothing suitable for 211–12
Mars 184–5, 186. *See also* war
Martha and Mary 210, 248
Martin of Tours, St 200
Mary, mother of Jesus, mariology xiv, xxxv–xxxvi, 2, 71, 73, 202, 203–4, 215
Mary, queen of Hungary xlviii, xlix, l, 178–80, 184–91, 230, 253, 256–7; ancestry and family of 183, 188, 195; character of 189
Mary Magdalene, St 83, 102, 193
Massaut, Jean-Pierre xxiv
Matthew, St 103

Maximilian I, emperor 178, 188
Mazurier, Martial 5
Meaux, circle of 5
meditatio mortis xxxix, 44, 118. *See also* death
Menander 2
Merari, mother of Judith 208
Methusalah 148
Midas 89
Middleton, William 6
Migli, Emilio de' 5
Milesians 89
Minerva 36
ministry, pastoral care xii, xvii, xxi, xxix, xxxi–xxxii, xxxvii–xxxix, xliv; in relationship to young widows 242–3
mite, widow's 232–6
Moeller, Johann Adam xv
Mohács, battle of 178–9, 180
monasticism, monastic life and observances xviii, xix, xlv–xlvi, 17, 19, 21–3, 35, 127, 130–3, 136–75; risks of 172–5; then and now 173–4. *See also* ceremonies
Monica, St, mother of Augustine 238
Monmouth, Humphrey 6
More, Margaret, daughter of Thomas xxxv
More, Thomas xxxv, xl, xliv, 3; *Utopia* xliv
Moses 21, 24, 31, 33, 160, 197, 221; Mosaic law 79, 223
mothers-in-law 222–4
mourning 186–7, 208, 217–18, 226, 229–30, 237–8, 256. *See also* death
mysticism: language of xxix; Rheno-Flemish tradition of xxxiv

Nain, widow of 236–8
nakedness, nudity xviii, 89
Naomi, mother-in-law of Ruth xlix, 180, 204, 221–6
Nebuchadnezzar 59
Nemesis 188–9
Neptune 64
Nestor 119, 148, 152
Noah 102
nobility, true 88–9
nominalists, medieval philosophers 10

Obed, grandson of Naomi 221
Ockham, William of 10
Odoni, Giovanni Angelo, letter to Erasmus 6
O'Donnell, Anne xi, xliv, 6
Olin, John xiv
O'Malley, John 182
Orcus 10
Orestes 163
Origen xxvii, xl, xliii, 3, 34, 51, 69, 108, 127
Orpah, daughter-in-law of Naomi 223

Pactolus 142
Padberg, Rudolf xxxvii
painting a word-picture (ekphrasis) 41, 130, 189–90
panegyric. *See* rhetoric
Paris, University of. *See* Sorbonne
passion of Christ xxv, xxxix
passions 43–6
pastoral practice. *See* ministry
Paul, St xliii, 2, 3, 11, 19, 20, 26, 34, 37, 40, 49, 64, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 79, 102, 103, 109, 127, 169, 180, 198, 206, 209, 227, 239
Paul the Hermit, St 74, 132, 174, 196
Paula, widow known to Jerome 204, 225, 246, 251
Paullus (I), Lucius Aemilius 145
Payne, John xiv
Paynell, Thomas xlvi
peace, personal or interior 38; in monastic seclusion 162–5
peace, societal xx, xxii, xliii, xliv, 14, 15, 25–6, 192; in monastic seclusion 159–62. *See also* war
Pelagianism xxiii
penance, sacrament of. *See* confession
Pentheus 59
Persians 87, 199
Peter, St 11, 15, 71, 102, 103, 109, 204, 210, 238; mother-in-law of 204
Peter Lombard, *Sentences* of 9

Phanuel, father of Anna 230
Pharisees 14, 20, 23, 28, 70, 205, 206, 222, 230, 247, 249–50
Philip, father of Mary of Hungary 187, 188, 192
Philistines, Philistinism 12–13, 32, 36
Phillips, Margaret Mann 5
philosophers, pagan 10, 33, 47, 67, 75, 118, 119, 133, 142, 170–1
philosophy of Christ (Christian philosophy, celestial philosophy) xxii–xxv, xl, xlix, l, 9, 11, 13, 191–2, 245; accessible to all 196
Phocion 87
physicians 9
Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni xiv
pietas, Erasmian: contents of xxi–xxv; influence of xxx–xxxiii; meaning of xi–xiii; modes of xvi–xxi; sources for xxv–xxviii; style and literary forms of xxviii–xxx
piety of widows: towards God 245–8; towards family and neighbours 248–51; false 247–8
pilgrimage xvii, 18. *See also* Compostela, Jerusalem, Rome
Plato, Platonism xxiii, xxviii, xliii, 16, 33, 42–3, 46, 47, 69, 84, 116, 142, 161, 194, 199; Academy of 161; *Phaedo* 44; *Republic* 84, 86 (cave of); *Timaeus* 42
pleasure(s) 89–90, 142–4; of monastic seclusion 165–72
Pole family of England xxv
Polyclitus 190–1
Polycrates 8
Pompey 100, 145
Pontius Pilate 14
popes, papacy 13, 14, 17, 101
Portia 201
Potiphar 197
poverty, the poor xx, xxiv, xliv, 87–9, 200. *See also* wealth
Powell, William 6
prayer(s) xxxv–xxxvi, 31, 210, 231–2
preaching, sermons xxv, xxix, 196–7; lack of 238–9
priests 14, 19, 116–17
princes xlix, 11, 13–17, 21, 99–101, 240–1; and philosophy of Christ 192–200
Principia, widow known to Jerome 204, 246
printers and publishers: Byddell, John 6; Dolet, Etienne 5; Eguía, Miguel de 4; Froben of Basel xl, xlvi, 4, 23; Fuchs, Hieronymus 4; Martens, Dirk 3, 4; Schumann, Valentin 4; Tournes, Jean de 5; Vingle, Pierre de 5; Worde, Wynkyn de 6
Proba, widow known to Augustine 204, 246
Prometheus 41, 63, 68
prophecy, gift of 231–2
Proserpina 147
Protagoras 85
Proteus 49
prudence 92
Ptolemy, king 201
public office xx, xliv, xlix, 98–101, 144–6. *See also* bishops, popes, princes
Puritanism, influence of Erasmus on xxxi
Pythagoras, Pythagoreans 69, 87, 90, 160; Architas 142

Quintilian 16, 85, 104

realists, medieval philosophers 10
reason 42–6, 54–5
relics of Christ 72; the shroud or tunic 72–3
religious orders xviii. *See also* Dominicans, Franciscans, etc
reputation, good name, value of 214–15
rhetoric, rhetoricians xviii, xxviii–xxx, xxxviii, xli–xlii, l, 124, 131, 133, 180–1
Rice, Eugene xiv
Roberts, Jennifer xxxv, xlviii, l
Rocco, St 63, 64
Rogers, William 7
Romans, Epistle to the, and Erasmus xxv, xl, 3
Rome, Romans 18, 87, 124, 198, 203, 233

Rummel, Erika xiv, xlv, xlvi, xlvii
Ruser, Johann 23
Ruth, model of widowhood 180, 221–6

sacraments, sacramental theology xiv, 26, 202. *See also* baptism, Eucharist, etc
Saint-Omer, monastery at 3, 127
saints, veneration and invocation of xvii, xxv, xxxvi, 63–5, 71–5, 79, 102–3
Salvia, widow known to Jerome 204
Samaritan woman of John's Gospel 193
Samson 68
sanctae (nuns), *sancti* 193
Sapidus, Johannes 23
Sara 49, 204, 221
Sardanapalus 165
Satan, the devil (the serpent) 15, 37, 41, 49, 68, 106–12, 194, 219, 238, 244, 247
Saul 37
scepticism xxviii
scholastics, scholasticism xii, xiii, xvi, xvii, xix, xx, xxi, xxvi, xxvii, 8–10; *artes praedicandi* of xii, xxxviii, xli
Scotus, medieval theologian (Subtle Doctor) 10, 35, 246
Scribes 205, 222
Scripture: allegorical interpretation of xxvii, xxix, xliii, l, 32–6, 68–70, 218–19, 232, 235–7; as comforter 254; intended for laity 193; intended for women 246–7; nature of xxv–xxvii, 32–8, 55–6, 101–3; reading of 126–7, 246–7
Scylla 30, 79
Segor 143
self-knowledge 38–41, 46, 122–3
Seneca xli, 171
sepulchre of Christ 82
serpent, Hesperian 41
Silenus 67
Simeon, who watched in the temple 232
Sinai, Mount 160
Sirens 118, 137
Sisyphus 59, 68, 144
Šlechta, Jan, Erasmus' letter to xiv
Socrates xxvii, 44, 66, 85, 87
Sodom 56, 82, 143, 252
Solomon 34, 60, 102, 109, 137, 195, 196, 203
Sorbonne (University of Paris) xv, xxxiv, 5, 8
soul. *See* man, outer and inner
Spain, clothing in 212
Spartans 87
spirit. *See* man, outer and inner
states (stations) of life xix, xxxiii–xxxv, xlviii, 16–18, 23, 180–2, 193, 195, 200–5. *See also* marriage, virginity, widowhood
Steyn, monastery of ix, xix, xlv, 2, 130
Stoics, Stoicism xxiii, xxviii, 38, 44, 93, 191
Stupperich, Robert xl
Suleiman I 178–9
Sulla, Lucius 164
Sulpitius, widow of 201
Sunnia, supposed widow known to Jerome 204, 246
superstition, superstitious practices xxv, xxxii. *See also* ceremonies
Sybarites 89
Sybils, as long-lived 148
Syrtes 137
Syrus, character in Terence 158

Tagus 142
Tantalus 59, 68
Tarentum 143
Telle, Emile xxxiii, xlviii
temptation 105–13
Terence 74, 158
Teresa of Avila, St xxxii
Theodoricus of Haarlem, pseudonymous author of *De contemptu mundi* 130, 134, 135
Thomas Aquinas, St xii, xxvi, xli, 9, 10, 170, 246. *See also* scholastics
Timon 162
Timothy, disciple of Paul 206, 239

Timothy, First Epistle to: Erasmus' exegesis of 1; widows in 241–53
Titonus 148
Tityus 59
Todd, Margo xxxi
Tournehem, castle of 2, 3
transformation in Christ xxiii, xxvi–xxvii, 56, 71
Trent, Council of xviii, xxxi; and the *Catechismus Romanus* xxxvii
Trinkaus, Charles xxviii
trust, resolve 56–8
Turk(s) (Saracens) 10–12, 18, 23, 94, 98, 178–9, 198, 234
Tyndale, William, translator of *Enchiridion* 6
tyranny 12–13, 16–17, 20

Ulysses 8, 137, 140
Utenheim, Christoph von, bishop of Basel 3; Erasmus' letter to xxxix
Uzzah 34
Uzziah, and Judith 215–16

varietas in Erasmus xviii–xx, xxii
Vatable, François 5
Vatican Council II xiii, xv
Veale, Abraham 6
Velenksý, Oldřich, translator of *Enchiridion* 4
vengeance. *See* anger
Venus 43, 46, 116
Vergara, Juan de 5
vestal virgin(s) 203
vigilance 24–30, 106
Virgil 27, 36, 138, 139, 215
virginity xviii, xxiii–xxxv, xlix, 18, 21; compared with widowhood and marriage 201–5. *See also* celibacy, chastity
virtue, good deeds 18, 85–93, 104–5, 149–50
Vitrier, Jean xi, xl, 3
Vladislav, king of Hungary and Bohemia 178
Voecht, Jacob de 2
Volz, Paul, Erasmus' letter to xi, xviii, xx, xxii, xl, xliii, 4, 6; text of letter 8–23
vows xvii, 9, 22; of chastity 244–5; dangers of 223, 244
Vulcan 36
Vulteius 141

Walsh, Sir John 6
war xx, xxiv, xliii, xliv, xlix, 10–14, 17, 26–7, 184–7, 192. *See also* peace
wealth, money 62–3, 87–9, 91, 140–2, 200, 209. *See also* poverty
Welzig, Werner 7
widow importunate in prayer, the 238
widowhood xix, xlix, 200–57; compared with marriage and virginity 201–5; interior or spiritual 253–6
widows: clothing suitable for 211–12; and the early ministry 238–9, 242–3; false 207; God's concern for 204–7; in 1 Tim 241–53
Wimpfeling, Jakob 23
wisdom 38–41
wives of princes, influence of 194–5
Wolsey, Cardinal Thomas 6
women, education of and issues relating to xxxv, 180–2; and Scripture 245–6
world, the: dangers of 136–40; definition of xliv–xlv, 101; disdain of 136–75; enemy of Christ 25; evils of 150–2; renunciation of 58–61. *See also* eschatology; worlds, visible and invisible
worlds, visible and invisible 65–84, 104–5

Xenophon 227
Xerxes 145

Zápolyai, John 179
Zarephath, widow/woman of, from Sidon 204, 206, 220–1, 234
Zebedee, sons of 31
Zechariah 205
Zoar, city of 252

This page intentionally left blank

This book

was designed by

ANTJE LINGNER

based on the series design by

ALLAN FLEMING

and was printed by

University

of Toronto

Press